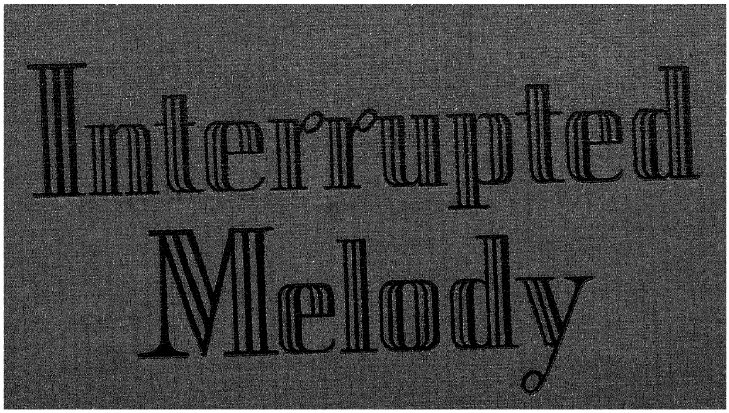

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After Marjorie Lawrence had won world-wide acclaim as a dramatic soprano, all obstacles seemed to be behind her. Yet at the crest of her operatic fame, she was stricken with paralysis—a catastrophe that would have brought utter despair to a lesser spirit.

In 1941, just after her happy marriage to Dr. Thomas King, Miss Lawrence collapsed at the dress rehearsal of *Die Walküre* at the opening of the National Opera Company's first season in Mexico City. The diagnosis was poliomyelitis. Few people thought she would ever sing again. But with the help of her devoted husband and later of Sister Kenny, Marjorie Lawrence forced herself to exercise her wasted muscles. Soon she was singing again, even if it was from a wheel chair.

With incredible bravery she resumed her concert and operatic career. In 1944 she returned to the Metropolitan as Venus in *Tannhäuser,* and later sang Isolde there. During and after the war she made an exhausting camp tour in the Pacific and Europe to sing for the armed forces. Although unable to walk, she now stands for her concert appearances and is carrying on her career with unabated vigor and success.

Interrupted Melody

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

BY

Marjorie Lawrence



NEW YORK

Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.

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To my husband, Tom,
without whose devotion and loving care
the melody might have remained interrupted

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1. Tale of a Horse!

ONE DAY in 1935 I scrawled my name across the contract that Edward Johnson, general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, had sent from New York, and pushed it across the table to Eric Semon, then the Metropolitan's representative in Paris. All was decided. I would obtain leave from the Paris Opéra the following season and sing a number of roles in New York.

I had had an earlier Metropolitan offer but had turned it down. The Paris Opéra was providing me with everything for which a singer could ask: good roles, good fees and a thoroughly musical environment in which to live and work. But, now that I was to go to New York, I was delighted at the prospect of singing in another of the world's great cities.

Semon put his name to the contract and shook my hand.

"Well, that's that," he said. "I'm delighted you are going to sing for us. Oh, and there's just one other thing. You know we sing Wagner in German in New York?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "of course!"

I had not given a thought to the language question. In Paris we sang Wagner in French. I spoke some German, but realized as I bade Semon good-by that I was going to be very busy relearning in their original language the Wagnerian roles I had contracted to sing.

I was not unduly dismayed. Six years had passed since I,

a starry-eyed Australian youngster with a conviction that she was a potential opera singer, had arrived in Paris. In those six years I had learned many things, among them that a singer can never afford to cease being a student. If you are to get to the top and remain there or near there, you must keep on studying.

Always there was something new to be mastered. Now it was to learn Wagner in German. I looked about me for a coach and decided to work with Edyth Walker, the American soprano, accepted by Europeans as an authority on German opera. At this time Edyth Walker's own singing days were over, but she had sung Wagner all over Europe, enhancing her fame with numerous performances of *Salome* and *Elektra* under the baton of the composer, Richard Strauss.

I had a most interesting time working with Edyth Walker. Not only did we study the German texts, but we examined opera scores in detail and had lengthy discussions about interpretation. We were going over the score of *Götterdämmerung* when I pointed out to her Wagner's direction that at the end of the Immolation Scene, Brünnhilde should mount her steed, Grane, and gallop him into Siegfried's funeral pyre.

"I've never seen anyone do that," I commented.

"I'm sure you haven't," Edyth Walker said. "But there's no doubt about it, Brünnhilde should ride Grane."

As I pictured in my mind the closing stages of *Götterdämmerung* I realized the dramatic lift the opera would receive if Wagner's directions were carried out. Never again, I decided there and then, would I do as other sopranos do—merely lead the animal to destruction.

"I'll ride the horse," I declared to Edyth Walker, "when I sing *Götterdämmerung* in New York."

Edyth Walker also came to New York and by the time we arrived in Manhattan we were wildly enthusiastic about our "discovery." The suggestion that we should exploit it, however, was very frigidly received at the Metropolitan.

Leopold Sachse, the stage director, immediately turned thumbs down on the proposal. The risk was too great, he said; the slightest slip would jeopardize the entire production. He was backed up by the late Artur Bodanzky, then the Metropolitan's leading conductor.

Bodanzky pointed out that the score permitted Brünnhilde only a few seconds to get on to the animal; that if the horse became frightened or anything else untoward occurred to cause even a delay of a fraction of a moment as the soprano mounted the horse, the opera would be ruined.

"These moments of *Götterdämmerung* are too precious to be risked," wailed Bodanzky. "They are the climax to the opera—the climax to *Der Ring* itself."

I derived some pleasure from the consternation I caused —particularly from the fact that I had upset Bodanzky. I had an old score to settle with him. I had met him in Paris a couple of years earlier and when he saw me he had commented, "A kid like you . . . you couldn't sing *The Ring.* It's ridiculous."

Poor Bodanzky! Not only was the "kid" going to sing *The Ring;* she was going to ride a horse while she did it.

When Sachse and Bodanzky appealed to Edward Johnson for support in what had developed into a heated artistic argument, he gave his celebrated noncommittal (his

better friends call it "diplomatic") chuckle and, apart from commenting that what I proposed to do "never was done," kept out of it.

In any case my mind was made up and I can be a most determined person. If I had needed any urging to stick to my guns as far as interpretation went, I was getting it from Edyth Walker. She was enjoying the hullabaloo we had caused.

Nevertheless, although my mind was made up, with Sachse and Bodanzky in charge I was not able to rehearse leaping onto Grane's back. But one thing I did learn from the rehearsals was that the gentlemen of the chorus and the supernumeraries were scared stiff of the horse which was to take part in the opera. Once those brave fellow artists deputed to lead the horse to me had done so, they moved hastily to another part of the stage, safely distant from the nag's clumping hooves. These fellows, I knew, could not be counted upon for aid if the horse did act up.

And that was how my brother, Cyril, then my personal manager, came to make his Metropolitan debut!

Cyril probably was the one person in New York who, knowing of my determination to ride Grane, regarded the matter with equanimity. He saw nothing extraordinary or hazardous about his sister jumping onto a horse and riding it bareback for a few yards—even if those few yards were across the stage of one of the world's most famous opera houses. Hadn't she ridden all kinds of horses for as long as he could remember?

A couple of days before the performance I broke the news to Cyril that he would have to be a "super" for the final act of *Götterdämmerung*. He would hold the horse while I leaped onto the animal's back at the psychological

moment. After all, Brünnhilde, a daughter of the gods, must mount her steed with becoming gracefulness and not scramble aboard like a farm girl.

When the opera began, only Edyth Walker, Cyril and myself knew how it was to finish. Between the acts I went backstage and talked to the horse. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. By the time Cyril led Grane on, I needed only a glance at the animal to know he was on my side. As for Cyril, despite a shockingly red wig and a make-up that might have been conceived by Boris Karloff, he was very much at home.

My brother and the horse were magnificent. The brief pause came in Brünnhilde's singing. On surged the orchestra. Cyril led Grane to me and I vaulted astride. I took up the music right on the beat, noting with relief that Bodanzky had not faltered. I sang the final soaring phrases, kicked my heels into the horse's flanks and, with right arm extended towards the heavens, galloped into the flames.

The house by this time was in pandemonium. I jumped from the horse, gave him the pat on the rump he deserved and went in front of the curtain to take call after call.

I think I sang very well that afternoon (it happened to be a matinee), but I have no delusion about its being my ability to ride a horse rather than my singing that enraptured musical New York. Next day the papers were full of it. Rhapsodic notices divided the glory between me and Messrs. Johnson and Sachse, who were eulogized for insisting on adherence to the score's directions.

I did not begrudge them a share of the success. As a matter of fact I gathered added delight from observing the smooth manner in which they accepted the praise as

though it were their due. Within a day or so I am sure the two gentlemen had convinced themselves that they really were responsible for my exploit.

I sang *Götterdämmerung* many times at the Metropolitan. Never after the first performance was there any question about my riding Grane nor did the slightest incident occur to justify those early fears of Messrs. Bodanzky, Sachse and the rest.

The last time I sang the opera at the Metropolitan—or anywhere else for that matter—was during the 1941 season, a few weeks before I went to Mexico City and contracted infantile paralysis.

Only at that last performance did my Grane do anything but behave like a well-trained sober animal. Each time I sang while he was on the stage that night, he emitted a long shrill whinny that cut through the music and penetrated every part of the theater. While others sang he was quiet, but directly I uttered a note, his eerie soul-chilling whinnying began.

Recalling the horse's behavior subsequently, friends suggested that he might have possessed some equine power of premonition and knew it was to be our last appearance together in an opera that had helped make each of us famous.

The story of my riding Grane preceded me back to France. I went almost directly to Vichy for the season there and nothing would do but that I should repeat my New York exploit. Naturally I agreed, with what then seemed tragic, but which I realize now were humorous, results.

The Vichy Opera House had no stable and was de-

pendent upon the local establishment of the French Army for horses needed for its productions. The steed produced for *Götterdämmerung* was a noble enough looking animal, but its tail and mane had been close-cropped in the army manner. A Grane without a flowing tail and mane is unthinkable.

I pointed out the animal's shortcomings to the stage director, but he told me not to worry. The opera house, experienced in dealing with army horses, had on hand an artificial tail and mane which would be attached to what was left of the animal's natural growth.

On the night we sang *Götterdämmerung* (or rather *Le Crépuscule des Dieux*) I was presented with a steed that was Grane to the life. A more highly spirited animal than the one I had ridden at the Metropolitan, he swished a long and lovely tail about his legs. I leaped upon him without difficulty and rode into the flames. I heard the beginnings of an ovation and then a bellow of laughter.

"What happened, what happened?" I yelled at a stagehand as I dismounted.

"Look," was all the fellow said as he lifted the horse's clipped bang.

I looked.

Grane's trailing glory had fallen off in midstage!

2. The Lawrences

I CANNOT remember when I did not want to sing. From the time I began to walk it was as natural for me to make noises approximating singing as it was to eat. During most of my waking hours little tunes bubbled out of me almost unbidden although, despite the urge and ability to sing, I had to wait until I was five to make my public debut as a vocalist. At that advanced age I gave what I am sure was an inspired performance of "Push the Pram for Baby" at a Sunday-school concert of an Australian bush church.

To be honest, I must add that I sang on that occasion because I alone among the members of the five-year-olds' class proffered my services when the call came for volunteers to sing a solo at the concert. Anyway, fond parents who put on their Sunday best and came in from their farms for the concert, gave me a prima donna's reception. Never before had people applauded anything I had done and, young as I was, I enjoyed it. From that afternoon my heart was set on being a singer.

The home into which I was born was a typical small Australian farmstead built on a site my father had cleared from the bush near Dean's Marsh in the State of Victoria. Father's people had migrated to Australia about the middle of the last century when Victoria, then a British colony, truly was an outpost of Empire. Gold had been discovered there not long before and most of the people who

made up the colony's population either were gold-seekers (and they came from every quarter of the globe) or men and women who had traveled out from the British Isles at the King's expense—as gentle a way as I know of saying they were convicts.

Grandfather Jasper Lawrence was a free settler from the Isle of Wight, and his wife, Julia Hobbs, was the daughter of a well-to-do Southampton silk merchant. My grandparents made the six-months' trip to Australia by windjammer without any ideas of getting rich quickly. But, like thousands of other people living in the British Isles in those days, they believed there existed a better chance to live freely and decently in Australia, wild young country though it was, than in class-conscious, overpopulated England, Ireland or Scotland.

The Lawrences made their first permanent Australian home near Modewarre, a little bit of a settlement about eighteen miles out of Geelong, on Port Phillip Bay. Even then Geelong was a colorful, bustling port where English and American windjammers came to load the wheat and wool Australian farms had begun to produce. At Moddewarre my grandparents ran a wayside stopping place that provided creature comforts for coach travelers going to and from Geelong.

The business prospered and steadily the Lawrence family grew. Motherhood, the responsibility of a family and helping to run a round-the-clock business developed gentle Julia Lawrence into the frontierswoman of tradition. Her Southampton friends would not have recognized her as the carefully brought-up, elegant young woman who had attended tea parties and sewing circles. When her husband became an invalid she not only nursed him, but

carried on the business unaided except for the assistance she enlisted from her children.

Most women would have felt that they had their hands full had they been situated as Grandmother Lawrence was in those days. But not she! As she saw her family growing up she realized she would have to find a fuller outlet for their youthful energy and capacity for work than the Modewarre enterprise provided. So, while her four sons and three daughters still were very young, she moved her family, including her sick husband, farther out into the bush to a place the people called Pennyroyal.

Here she had acquired a substantial stretch of virgin land through which a strong young creek bounced its rocky way for most of the year. With her children helping, she cleared the scrub and sowed a crop; giant trees which studded the property were toppled and hauled off by bullock team to a distant mill. Later the lumber was brought back to Pennyroyal and used to build the comfortable old homestead which was the Lawrence home for many a year.

During the months between their arrival at Pennyroyal and the building of the homestead, the Lawrences endured what must have been a very rugged existence. They lived in a bark and bush timber "humpy" and father used to tell us how the dingos—Australian wild dogs—came howling round the flimsy shelter at night, scaring the daylights out of his young body.

Throughout their trials and tribulations the Lawrences looked to their mother for leadership, guidance and comfort. Never did she fail them. Her family told a hundred tales of her wisdom, ingenuity and courage. I like to think I inherited something of her ability to endure setbacks

and difficulties and to go on planning and working in the face of apparently overwhelming odds.

I do not know if my paternal grandfather was a musician. Certainly his son (and my father), William, was. If he had not been, he might never have married my mother. At Dean's Marsh, nine miles closer to Geelong than Pennyroyal, another pioneering family with the not very distinguished name of Smith had settled. Robert Smith, an Englishman who had married Mary McMannimin, a lovely black-haired colleen from Killater in County Tyrone, had arrived at Dean's Marsh about the time the Lawrences were digging in at Pennyroyal.

Like the Lawrences, the Smiths had produced what in these days of lagging birth rates would be considered a large family. And even in that pre-automobile era, people living a bare nine miles apart regarded each other as neighbors. Friendships developed between the young people from the two families and they became members of the same social set—although the Smiths, the Lawrences and their friends would have been surprised to hear such a term applied to their association.

Whatever qualities a girl needed to become a leader in such a group were possessed by Robert Smith's daughter Elizabeth. She had inherited her mother's beauty and charm and was one of those people who automatically and without effort take the lead in community affairs. William Lawrence, too, was an outstanding figure among his youthful contemporaries—primarily because of his virtuosity as a player of the one-string fiddle and the concertina, highly prized accomplishments in a community whose most exciting social entertainment was a dance in a farmer's barn.

Both the Smiths and Lawrences were musical. Elizabeth played the organ at the Church of England in Dean's Marsh. Her four brothers and two sisters were among the choristers she accompanied at the weekly services. William Lawrence, possibly animated by the fact that his action would provide additional meetings with Elizabeth, also joined the choir and quickly showed parishioners that his musical ability did not end in the dance hall. His manly baritone made a stirring addition to the church's vocal talent and, as his knowledge of religious music broadened and he learned to handle his big voice, he was much sought after as a soloist by neighboring towns.

No wonder Elizabeth Smith loved my father. He was extremely handsome and strong as an ox, his massive shoulders having been broadened by hard outdoor work from the time he was big enough to lift an axe. There were Australian men of a later generation, the original Anzacs who fought at Gallipoli in the First World War, of whom John Masefield said, "They walked like kings in old poems." That might well have been said about William Lawrence.

On the surface he appeared, at least to his children, a hard, stern individual. But this seeming toughness was a veneer shielding the tender emotions of one of the kindest and most considerate of men—as I discovered before I was very old.

Elizabeth and William were very young when they married. They bought a property near Dean's Marsh and began to develop what Australians call a "mixed" farm: a couple of cows, some sheep, pigs and poultry, with oats the main crop. No Australian works as hard as the small farmer, unless it be the small farmer's wife. My father not

only farmed, but at various times established and operated small businesses—a butcher's shop, a smithy, a bakery and a saddlery—in Dean's Marsh township. But despite their hours of exacting toil and the frequent visits the stork paid to their home, the Lawrences continued to sing in the Dean's Marsh choir and even to play and dance at the local "hops."

I was only two years old and, I am led to believe, a thin, unlovely individual with wispy straw-colored hair, when my mother died. Eight days previously she had given birth to her sixth child, the fourth brother for me and my sister Eileen. At the age of two the tragedy of a mother's death leaves the emotions unscathed, although, as in my case, the happening may drastically change one's whole subsequent life. Because my lack of years kept me ignorant, I did not realize how my existence frustrated the plans my poor bewildered father made to keep his household functioning.

Eileen and our brothers Lindsay, Ted and Cyril were older than I and did not constitute such a problem for Father. But a two-year-old in a motherless home creates all kinds of difficulties. Father must have been near desperation when his mother, by then a widow, came to his rescue. Grandmother Lawrence still lived at Pennyroyal in the original old homestead which had grown soft and beautiful with the years. At her suggestion I was taken out there to live, a move which made the lives of several people (including mine) immeasurably happier.

At my father's place I had been pretty much of a pest, but at Pennyroyal I was the only child in the house and was treated like a princess. Grandmother Lawrence bought me a complete new wardrobe (I still have memo-

ries of a green plush dress which was my particular joy) and she and her old housekeeper, Ettie Lewis, could not have given me more care and adulation had I been royalty.

I was far on the way to becoming a very spoiled brat when Grandmother died and I went back to the rough-and-tumble of Father's house. There for the next several years I was subjected to a toughening process, the common lot of any member of a largish family not overendowed with worldly riches. This was rather difficult to endure at the time, but was excellent conditioning for my subsequent experiences in the competitive hurly-burly of an opera singer's career.

Even without my bothersome presence, things had not gone too smoothly at home. Dad worked hard almost round the clock, and a succession of housekeepers engaged to help run his house and family made the confusion of the motherless household worse confounded. Not that the post of being the Lawrences' housekeeper was a sinecure. We were a wild, unruly bunch very much given to bickering and squabbling.

But those housekeepers! One or two brought children of their own with them, thereby increasing the possibilities of juvenile warfare and high jinks. More than one was overfond of alcohol and I will always remember one beauty because she persuaded Father to let her take me on an excursion to Melbourne.

It was my first visit to the Victorian capital and we had a wonderful time eating in cafés and wandering about the streets enraptured by the shops and theaters. Before we returned home, the housekeeper bought presents for every member of the family, and as we traveled back in

the train, I thought her the sweetest, most generous person to come into my life.

Alas for my disillusionment! We had been back on the farm only a couple of days when Father discovered the housekeeper had robbed his cashbox to pay for the Melbourne junket.

Father's good looks and masculine charm were responsible for the brevity of the stay several other housekeepers "enjoyed" with us. These unfortunate creatures became so enamored of our Dad that it was apparent even to his sons and daughters. We Lawrence children had read our fairy stories and knew what evil creatures stepmothers were. We made up our collective mind that there would be no stepmother in our house. Whenever we sensed the possibility of father's installing one, we would forget our bickerings and team up to make life for the woman so miserable that her passion was dampened and she fled the place.

I won the admiration of my brothers and sisters for a coup I achieved in getting rid of one particularly pleasant woman who, I realize upon more mature reflection, possibly would have become an ideal wife for my father. We knew she admired him and saw he was not unmindful of her good qualities. This was a case calling for drastic treatment and drastic treatment it received. We gave the woman the usual course of disobedience, defiance and general rowdiness for several days and then I drove the final nails in the coffin of her romance.

I climbed a tall tree alongside the house and set up a howling and yelling audible for miles. Fascinated by the din I created, I kept it up until I attracted the attention of neighbors and passers-by. Then, having got my audience,

I began to bellow, "I won't come down until that woman goes away. She doesn't like me. She beats me." My brothers and sisters grouped beneath me provided a chorus of sobs punctuated with exclamations of "Poor Marge. Poor Babe."

When we knew we had the sympathy of the assemblage I climbed down, putting on a terrific act of a frightened, terrified child. Were Australians given to lynching, I think that housekeeper might have ended her days there and then dangling at the end of a rope. As it was, I was able to end my act before the crowd was roused to violence, because the object of my attack rushed into the house and began to pack. She caught the next train back to Melbourne.

Our home did not get onto a nearly even keel until Eileen reached the age of fourteen, left school and took charge. Eileen was efficient and stood for no nonsense. She pushed us round and kept order, saw that we did our home studies and the jobs about the farm which Father allotted us. But not even the most self-sacrificing and affectionate elder sister (and Eileen was that, God bless her) can take the place of a mother in a child's life. Another person, of course, can see that a child's physical needs are attended to and even love a child very dearly, but there is a void in the life of every child who grows up without a mother's affection.

Had my mother lived, I surely would have been a softer, gentler creature and not the wild tomboy character I was until well into my teens. More important, had I had the experience of loving a mother and of being loved by a mother, I am sure my first love affairs would have been, let us say, better balanced than they were. Loving and

being loved were experiences new to me. When they did come into my life, I went completely overboard. My heart will always go out to a child who has lost its mother in early life by death or divorce.

I must have been nearly ten when Eileen began to shoulder the job of running the house and us. I was doing quite well at school because, although I was an unruly child, learning was not difficult for me. I always have had a most retentive memory, a precious gift for a not over-studious child and an opera singer. Moreover, school was a happy place for me because while I was still in the low classes I established myself as a personality through being a soloist with the school choir and, therefore, something of a heroine—especially when we sang in public and it was generally accepted that my singing was an honor for the school. So, all things considered, I enjoyed my school days. What bad marks came my way were meted out not because of lack of scholarship, but for chattering in class. I loved to gossip. Even now one of my sternest tasks of self-discipline is to refrain from talking too much on days when I must sing at night.

I was very young when I began to learn to play the piano. Father insisted that each of us learn an instrument and one day a week the music teacher drove out in her horse and buggy to our house from the township of Birregurra, nine miles away. We all had good voices and almost nightly, directly the supper things were put away, we gathered round the piano and sang all kinds of songs.

What a pity it is that the radio and gramaphone have put an end to the family sing-song. People of no very substantial musical talents no longer amuse themselves by singing and playing together. Even if the musical

standards achieved were not always high, the old-fashioned musical evening must have had a very good effect on human relations. I know our singing and playing together did a lot towards making the Lawrences a happy family.

There was a time when I thought it would be impossible to be on bad terms with anyone with whom I collaborated to make music—but that was before I sang in opera.

3. Musical Missionary

WHAT WITH THEIR singing in the local choirs and their music lessons, the Lawrences began to earn themselves a reputation for being musical—and began, too, to have some regard for their musical talents. Perhaps it was a good thing for their vanity that the Reverend Alex J. Pearce, a knowledgeable musician, became pastor at the Dean's Marsh Church of England and showed them they had quite a deal to learn about music in general and singing in particular.

Alex Pearce's musical reputation preceded him. The new minister had had outstanding successes with his choirs at Victoria's (and Australia's) most important eisteddfod at Ballarat and at the annual choral festivals at Geelong, Bendigo and other Victorian towns. Parish gossipers speculated on the reason for a man of his talent being willing to take a bush church like ours. Their clacking tongues were not silenced until it became known that his wife had died suddenly and, grief-stricken, he had accepted the call to Dean's Marsh to escape people and places that recalled her memory to him.

Alex Pearce's coming among us was a particular godsend to me. He had been at Dean's Marsh only a couple of days when he began to round up talent for a choir. Even if a member of the family does say it, he struck it rich in the Lawrences. He got my brother Lindsay (a

baritone), Ted (a tenor) and Cyril, who besides being a boy soprano in the English cathedral tradition, had developed quickly into a competent pianist. And for good measure, Alex Pearce got me for his choir.

I was nearly eleven and I am not certain how my voice would have been classified, but it was phenomenally powerful and of extraordinary range. With the advent of Alex Pearce, singing for the first time became a serious business for me. Until then I had sung when and how the spirit moved me. The new minister put curbs on my caroling and endeavored to show me that music was like grammar: there were rules governing its construction and interpretation. At first I found the restrictions of musical law and order irksome. Singing ceased to be fun. But as we learned the cantatas of Bach and the oratorios of Handel, Stainer and Mendelssohn, I found a new and deeper joy in being able to sing. Moreover, the compass of my voice permitted me to undertake almost any role in these works and I built up a knowledge of part singing and solos that was money in my musical bank in later years.

The people of Dean's Marsh soon discovered I "had a voice." As they came out of church of a Sunday they would tell my father I "had sung like an angel." I have never found out how information about the vocal standards of heavenly choirs is obtained. For all I know I may have sung like an angel, but there was nothing angelic about my temperament or appearance. The study and singing of religious music exercised no refining influence on me. My deepest regret was that I was not a boy. Not that a girl received preferred treatment on Bill Lawrence's farm. I milked cows, drove sheep from paddock to paddock, fed pigs and generally pulled my weight in helping

to run the place. And many was the time that Alex Pearce's choir practice was delayed while that good man left the other singers and strode down to a large pond that lay between our farm and the church, compelled me to desist from my favorite sport of catching tadpoles and hauled me off, frequently dripping wet, to sing.

Perhaps Artur Bodanzky and Leopold Sachse would not have been perturbed about my riding Grane in *Götterdämmerung* had they known I was only seven years old when my father tossed me on the bare back of one of our horses and told me to ride it. This was the method he followed in "teaching" all of us to ride. Results proved its effectiveness. By the time I was ten there was not a horse on our farm or any other in our district that I could not ride.

The most exhilarating thrill of my teen years was to get on one of our best horses and tear over the paddocks like a fury, riding without saddle or bridle and feeling the muscles of the horse stretching and straining between my bare legs. I liked best to ride and sing at night when the bright moonlight softened the harshness of the bush and the leaves of the gum trees sparkled as though they were studded with diamonds.

In the still air my voice carried tremendous distances and neighbors would greet each other by saying: "Marge was out again last night . . . the breeze was blowing in our direction."

When I went to Paris I smiled as I watched singers coddle themselves and advise me not even to speak when out of doors lest a puff of fresh air sneak down my throat and wreak some appalling damage. As I heard them mumble behind the swathe of mufflers they wrapped round

their precious throats and mouths, my mind pictured a yellow-haired kid, rain beating on her freckled face, the wind pressing her skimpy dress skintight against her body, riding like a mad thing across an Australian sheep paddock, lustily singing "The Hallelujah Chorus" from *The Messiah.*

Like any other sensible singer, I take care of my voice. Some parts of the human body required to produce and maintain a singing voice are comparatively fragile. If they are abused they can become impaired, but I have to be convinced that fresh air ever harmed any voice. I have never coddled myself or my voice, but have often wondered how singers—and there are many—who live gay lives manage to sing as well as they do. Late nights, drinking to anything like excess and smoking will take the sheen off a voice far more quickly than all the winds that ever blew and all the rain that ever fell.

4. Love — It's Called

"WELCOME HOMES" for troops returning from the First World War provided me with new and frequent opportunities to demonstrate my vocal talents in public. Ballads of the "Carissima" variety constituted my repertoire at this stage of my "artistic" development. I sometimes speculate upon what the feelings of the returning heroes must have been when they realized they had fought to preserve a way of life that produced precocious, stagy little girls who warbled that "life was only made for laughter."

I was enthralled by singing in public. Probably I was some kind of juvenile exhibitionist. I sang anywhere and any time I could get people to listen. Actually my entire family was giving vent to an urge to sing to people. Alex Pearce organized concerts all over the district in which the Lawrences took a prominent, almost monopolizing, part. There would be trios by the Lawrences, duets by the Lawrences and solos galore by the Lawrences, with brother Cyril always right in the picture as accompanist.

We must have overdone things somewhat because it came back to us that people were saying they were getting more of the Lawrences' singing than they welcomed. We attributed this talk to downright jealousy and went our musical way unabashed. Personally, I told myself that if I

did not sing well people would not always applaud me the way they did.

If gossip had caused my confidence and high opinion of my vocal prowess to waver, they regained their stability and flourished anew when one of the municipal leaders of Dean's Marsh, Mr. Edgar Mountjoy, referred to me one night as "our little Melba." Other people took up the name and masters of ceremony frequently introduced me at local concerts as "Marjorie Lawrence, the little Melba." I knew very little about the great Dame Nellie then, but I did know she was an Australian singer regarded by her fellow countrymen as being "the world's greatest soprano." Therefore I always felt very good when I was referred to as "the little Melba."

And then there was the man who heard me sing and told me I should go to Paris and study. Why Paris and not London, Berlin, New York or Milan, I do not know; but Paris was what the fellow said and the suggestion filled me with blinding ecstasy. I was too overwhelmed to ask questions about why and wherefore.

The manner of my meeting this "prophet" would have shocked the sensibilities of any disciple of Emily Post, and my father was furious when it was brought to his notice. This memorable meeting took place when I was fourteen. Father's hard work had brought its temporal reward and the Lawrences had climbed a rung or so up the social and economic ladder. Father had sold the old place at Dean's Marsh and bought a couple of thousand acres near Winchelsea, a larger town about fourteen miles away. There he built a home comfortable enough, he hoped, to keep his family from "straying." The house was about three miles from Winchelsea and it was one of my family tasks

to ride my horse into the township to do the marketing. On one of these excursions I met the man who told me I should go to Paris.

It was a languid, heavy-aired summer day and when I rode down Winchelsea's main street I heard the sound of what seemed to be a piano being played in an extremely dexterous manner. Parked in the middle of Winchelsea's equivalent of a village green was a large caravan—or, as Americans call it, a trailer. From this the music came. I rode over and peeked through the vehicle's open door. I was astonished to see how sumptuously equipped it was, but later discovered it was a mobile furniture display, driven around the countryside by its owner.

As I looked inside I saw the owner, a stout, pleasant-looking man, playing a player piano and doing it very well. The instrument was equipped with all kinds of gadgets and he was using them to get very beautiful and thoroughly musical effects. If everyone who tried to play a pianola had been as skilled and as tasteful a performer as this one, I do not think the instrument would now be a musical dead duck.

The man smiled and beckoned me in. He was playing a ballad I knew. Standing alongside him, I began to sing. Now the player showed he really was a musician, following my rubatos, shading his tone and shaping his phrases to suit my interpretation. Despite the fact that his instrument was a pianola, I never before had sung with so sensitive an accompanist. A crowd gathered but we kept on with our concert. My marketing was completely forgotten.

For each of the next three or four days, I was able to discover some urgent matter to take me into the township. Unfortunately one cannot give daily recitals in the public

square of a place like Winchelsea without its coming to the knowledge of the entire population. When Father heard the news he read the riot act to me, warning me of the dangers inherent in talking to strange men—but not before my musician friend, whose name I never did discover, had told me that I should go to Paris.

Paris! It seemed as distant as the moon and it was impossible for me to visualize going there. But Melbourne —I could go to Melbourne! Melbourne was only a few hours away. I had read in the newspapers about famous artists giving concerts there and people advertised in the Melbourne papers every day that they gave singing lessons.

For two years I nursed the idea of going to Melbourne and, from time to time, hinted to Father what I had in mind. His reaction was one of violent opposition. Singing in the home, in church, at local gatherings was all very well, but going to Melbourne for lessons might lead anywhere—even to the professional stage! No daughter of his, he raged, was going on the stage. And he was surprised and hurt that I should even contemplate leaving the home he had worked and striven to make so comfortable and happy for us all. I did not argue. That would have been futile. When Dad's mind was made up, it remained made up. I knew that if I were to go to Melbourne to study singing I would have to do what is popularly described as "running away from home."

My ambition to learn to sing, to find out more about music, continued to blaze. I was playing the piano fairly well and had built up a repertoire of ballads and church music, but this was inadequate fare for my musical appetite. I listened to recordings of Clara Butt and Melba and

felt I could learn to sing like either of them although I could not make up my mind whether I should become a contralto like Butt or a soprano like Melba. I spent hours at a time out in the paddocks, as far from the house as possible, doing my best to imitate both of the celebrated singers. First I would be Butt growling away at "Land of Hope and Glory"; then Melba letting off the pyrotechnics of the Mad Scene from *Lucia*—to the utter bewilderment of unfortunate, stupid-looking sheep who ceased their grass nibbling and gathered round to listen.

I had been told that if a girl ran away from home before she was eighteen her parents could bring her back; once over that age, however, a person was deemed by law to be fitted to decide whether or not she would live under the parental roof. Determined to go to Melbourne for singing lessons immediately after my eighteenth birthday, I began taking sewing lessons from a Mrs. Ada Boddington, an Englishwoman who lived near us. I planned to earn my living sewing while I learned to sing.

Ada Boddington fascinated me. She had an elegance and *savoir faire* rare among the women of our community. Perhaps it was their realization that she was "different" which caused some of them to dislike her. Frequently I heard her referred to as a "red-ragger," because of her suffragist activities.

Red-ragger or no, Ada Boddington was a skilled needlewoman. During my first Australian concert tour she made a concert gown for me, and her work was as exquisite as that of any celebrated French *couturier*. Learning to sew from her was richly rewarding. She had seen and known many famous and glamorous people in England, and with her tales about them she whetted my desire to see the

world outside Winchelsea. And because of what she taught me, I made my own clothes for many years and for a time supported myself by working in a clothing factory—but that was not yet.

My long-range plans for going to Melbourne were developing beautifully when I fell in love . . . and my singing and everything else in life except a hefty lump of Australian manhood were forgotten. The object of my affection was Pat Considine, a fine-looking lad who had come home to Winchelsea after having been educated by the Jesuits at Xavier College, Melbourne. Pat's father was dead and his mother had married Tom Ryan, a jovial colonial Irishman who was proprietor of Winchelsea's main hotel.

Falling in love was a horribly serious business for me and Pat, so serious we were utterly miserable for the entire period of our romance. Our parents were even less happy, if that were possible, when we announced that we wished to marry.

My father and the Ryans were on most friendly terms, Father being among the most respected patrons of the Ryan pub. But the idea of his daughter marrying a Catholic horrified him as much as my wanting to be a professional singer. The Ryans were no happier at the prospect of their son taking a Protestant for a wife.

His parents need not have worried about Pat. He had told me almost as soon as he proposed that he would never dream of marrying me unless I became a Catholic. When he discovered that I would not immediately abandon the faith of *my* fathers, he was amazed. He tried to force his religious beliefs upon me, arguing and wrangling whenever we were together. Much as I loved him, this made me angry.

In later years, when I was living with a French Catholic family in Paris, I experienced an almost compelling impulse to become a Catholic.

It was a revelation to me to see how integral a part of their lives the Church is for a truly religious family. Returning from work or a shopping expedition, my French friends always made a visit to the chapel near the home, just as they might call upon a close friend, without ceremony or invitation. Whenever I was about to fulfill an important singing engagement—and especially at the end of my student days when I began giving auditions—they would go to the church, light votive candles before the altar and pray for my success.

The informality with which these people practised their religion and the completeness of their faith made a strong appeal to me who had been brought up a strict Anglican, taught to believe one went to church only after having been scrubbed and shined and wearing one's best clothes. Had I stayed in France I might have become a Catholic.

After anguish-filled weeks of arguing and bickering with Pat and my father, I made up my mind not to marry him and told him so. We were both upset because we were very fond of each other. He swore he would never marry anyone else. And, as far as I know, he never has. I do not think I have recovered completely from my first encounter with the gentle passion either. I saw Pat Considine when I was back in Australia in 1939 and the sight of him caused my heart to give a couple of quick beats. Falling in love the first time is a memorable thing in any woman's life.

5. Running Away

A FIXED determination to go on with my singing followed the end of my romance. I had read in the Melbourne newspapers that John Brownlee, an Australian, had become one of the leading baritones at the Paris Opéra and that the man with whom he had studied in Australia was Ivor Boustead whose studio was in Melbourne. I wanted Boustead to hear me. He would know, I told myself, whether I had a voice worth worrying about.

I announced to Cyril and Eileen that I had made up my mind to go to Melbourne. Wise old Eileen, knowing it would be conducive to the happiness of the entire family if I could be convinced one way or the other about my singing, promised her help. And Cyril, who wanted me to be a singer as passionately as I did myself, said, "Yes, go to Melbourne and sing for Boustead—but I'm going with you."

The only person we knew in Melbourne was Linda Kahle, a distant cousin who had once spent a vacation with us in Winchelsea. Cyril and I thought that if we wrote the right kind of letter to Linda she could not refuse to invite us to stay with her. So we wrote and sure enough back came an invitation to be guests of Linda and her family—for one week. That was enough for us.

With Eileen as a coconspirator, Cyril and I planned our getaway like a couple of bank robbers. The train for

Melbourne left Winchelsea at seven in the morning. That meant we would have to be up and away before Father got out of bed. Usually he was about by six o'clock but remained around the house until after breakfast. We thought that if we left about five o'clock we would be clear of the place before Father was astir and would have ample time to walk the three miles to the station.

We did discuss the possibility of Eileen driving us in the family Model T Ford. But we ruled that out. That Model T of ours was noisy—even for a model T—and Father, accustomed to sleeping in the quietness of the bush, slept so lightly that even the hum of a mosquito wakened him. There was nothing for it but to walk.

Carrying our possessions in two suitcases and with our savings (and Eileen's) stowed in Cyril's pockets, we stole out of the house and headed down the road to the railway. The sun was just coming up and the magpies greeted it with their warbling. We looked back as we came to the turn in the road for one last glance at the house. I gave a sob and would have turned back had Cyril not grabbed my arm.

"Come on," he said. "Do you want to miss that train?"

With fame beckoning and my brother urging me along, I swung down the road.

Linda Kahle met us in Melbourne, but the warmth of her greeting slumped fifty degrees when we announced we had come not for a week but indefinitely and that, for the time being, we would not be able to pay anything for our board and lodging. Linda, whose family's house was at Coburg, a Melbourne suburb, told us that although she and her people would be delighted to have us with them for as long as we pleased, it was a delight their financial

resources would not permit. I told Linda not to worry too much about that—Cyril and I were going to get jobs and (sooner or later) would be able to pay for anything it cost to house and feed us.

On the way out to Coburg I bought a newspaper and was elated to see a string of advertisements for seamstresses in the "Situations Vacant" column. The lessons from Ada Boddington were about to pay off, I imagined, but my plans suffered their first setback when I tried to land one of the jobs advertised. I discovered that all the sewing machines in Melbourne clothing factories were electrically driven and far too speedy for me to manipulate, accustomed as I was to the old treadle type.

But I went back to the Kahles that night aflame with happiness. During the afternoon I had presented myself at Ivor Boustead's studio and asked him to listen to me sing. I must have looked like the original country bumpkin, but if he was shocked at my appearance or at my request, he did not show it.

He sat down at his piano, thumped a chord and told me to sing some scales. My voice sounded tremendous in the little studio and even I was thrilled at the reverberating tones I produced. Higher and higher we went. Boustead played a final chord and away I flew up the scale with the confidence of a steeple jack. Boustead took his hands from the piano and looked hard at me.

"That was a top *C* you sang then, young woman," he said.

"I imagined it was," I replied, as bold as you like.

My boldness vanished though, and I was nothing more than a very excited girl when the teacher added, "You

have a magnificent natural voice. One of the best I have heard."

My impulse was to throw my arms round Boustead's neck and kiss him. Then I wanted to laugh and cry both at once. Boustead, guessing how I felt, began asking questions: Who was I? Where did I come from? Where had I sung? He continued to ask questions until I had composed myself sufficiently to answer. I told him my story.

"Well, get yourself a job," he said, "and when you are ready, come back. I will be delighted to teach you."

I flew home and told Cyril we would have to get work quickly. I felt there was not a minute to lose. At eighteen, one begins to imagine one is getting old. I feared I was so ancient that if I did not push ahead with my singing I would be an old, old woman before I achieved anything.

Cyril and I landed jobs the next day. They were easier to get than to hold. He unloaded himself upon the unsuspecting proprietor of a soda fountain in Collins Street, Melbourne's main shopping thoroughfare. Cyril is a most versatile fellow and I have seen him deal competently with many and varied tasks. The art of soda jerking, though, was beyond him. While blending a concoction for a thirsty customer during his first day in the soda fountain business, he pressed the wrong series of buttons and started a minor flood. Water and soda were still spraying all over the shop as he put on his coat and, strongly urged on by the proprietor, fled the premises.

Cyril tried his farmer's hand at several things after that until he was taken on as a salesman by a life insurance firm. For this calling he showed a more pronounced aptitude and in what seemed a miraculously short time was earning enough money not only to contribute towards the

cost of our bed and board, but to help pay for my lessons.

I derived little pleasure from my first job. As a matter of fact it nearly drove me mad, and although I needed the twenty-four shillings a week it brought me as urgently as a locomotive needs steam, I left after the first week. Officially I was described as a "finisher" and my task was to sew long straight rows of ornamental buttons down the fronts of frocks. From eight in the morning until five at night, I sat at a wooden bench sewing button after button firm and fast into position.

I was able to tolerate working indoors, and became accustomed to the noise of the factory. I was busy thinking about many things other than sewing buttons on frocks and the monotony of the work, therefore, was bearable. If these had been the only shortcomings attached to this first attempt of mine to earn my daily bread, I might have persisted for longer than a week with it. But the workers at the factory were not permitted to speak. I was expected —nay, compelled by the watchful eye of an overseer—to sew all the long day and never utter a word to my fellow sufferers alongside and opposite me. It was more than human flesh could endure.

My next job also was in a clothing factory, a more human and pleasant place than the first, and my task there was less irksome. Of more practical importance, the salary was higher, thirty shillings ($5.00) a week. Here I spent the day matching buttons and cottons for materials that would be made into frocks. Compared with my button-sewing marathon at job Number One, this was an interesting and diverting assignment. Happily, too, there was no taboo on talking.

The girls with whom I worked were typical of their

class in the Australian community, hard-working, intelligent and friendly to anyone honest and fair with them. When I told them why I had come to Melbourne, they were warmly interested and later, when my lessons with Boustead began and the matching of cottons, buttons and dress materials ceased to be the dominating interest of my existence, they helped me with traditional working-class solidarity.

Twice a week during my lunch hour I tore from the factory to Boustead's studio. The difference in atmosphere and surroundings between the grubby, noisy factory and the pleasant little studio with its big black piano and photographs of famous singers and "grateful students" was marked. During my first couple of lessons I felt I was leading a double life. I became so absorbed in my lessons that I invariably arrived back late at the factory, but the other girls, knowing what I was about, always did my work along with their own, covering up my return after the deadline from the overseer's eye.

My career as a matcher of fabrics, cottons and buttons came to an abrupt and unhappy end one day when I overestimated the capacity of my colleagues to conceal my absence at a singing lesson and returned about half an hour late. My employer, who also ran a dress shop that generally occupied her attention in another part of the city, had chosen this particular day to look things over at the factory. She was waiting for me when I came back and fired me on the spot.

I drew upon all the resources of my dramatic talent and pleaded with the woman to let me keep my job. With tears and gestures, I told her the story of my desire to be a singer, confessing to the cause of my lateness and prom-

ising never to offend again. But the lady's mind was made up. She had sacked me and I would remain sacked. She told me so in the most positive terms.

Yet, so quaint a thing is our human nature that on my two Australian tours since becoming a successful opera singer, this woman has sought me out in Melbourne, professing her affection for me and her constant interest in my career. Without a blush, she will boast of how she helped me when I first came to Melbourne to study.

No wonder some of us singers become cynics!

6. Prodigals' Return

LOSING THAT JOB at the factory was a tragedy. On our earnings, augmented by the five shillings a week Eileen managed to scrape together and send us, Cyril and I had been managing well. My voice was developing and Boustead was teaching me some wonderful songs. He recognized the dramatic potentialities of my voice and directly my technique had developed sufficiently, we began to work on operatic arias. Then came that terrible day when we lingered too long over Verdi's "O Don Fatale" and I lost my job.

After the inevitable few hours of frenzied desperation that follow such a catastrophe, when you imagine the bottom has fallen out of your world, I pulled myself together. Before I went home that night I put an advertisement in the Melbourne *Age* offering to do housework in return for board, lodging and the use of a piano.

This brought one reply. A couple of days later I was working for two very prim maiden ladies, an accountant and a schoolteacher, who had a house near Melbourne at Clifton Hill. I did all their work—cooking, scrubbing, washing, ironing and the rest—and then paid them five shillings a week in return for a home with them and the right to use their piano during my spare time—if any.

Nevertheless, even if I were a victim of what my Australian friends would call "capitalist exploitation," living

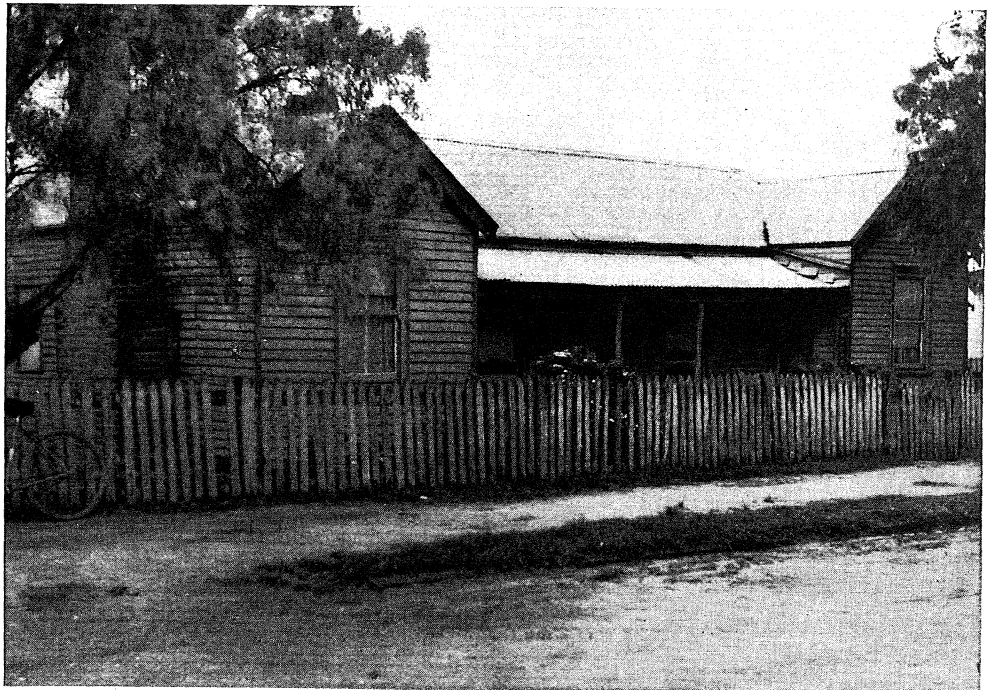
with those two maiden ladies (I am sure they really were) did not work out badly for me. They were out of the house all day, so I was free to work at my singing whenever I chose, and I was young and strong and whizzed through the housework without much trouble.

After a few weeks at Clifton Hill, and just as I was settling down to a satisfactory routine, the even tenor of my way was again disturbed, this time through no fault of mine. Father discovered Eileen was keeping back five shillings a week from her housekeeping money and sending it to me. Understandably he was still extremely annoyed at Cyril and me for having cleared out, and he forbade Eileen, under threat of every kind of punishment, to send us another penny. Eileen had no alternative but to obey. I was compelled to put another advertisement in the *Age*. This time I asked not only for board, bed and access to a piano, but for a "salary" of five shillings (about one dollar) a week as well in return for my labor as a domestic servant.

Again I got one reply.

It came from a dear old soul, a Mrs. Gregory, who ran a boardinghouse at Middle Park, about six miles from Melbourne. I went to see her and quickly felt she was skeptical about me. But her house was pleasant and in one corner of the room in which she interviewed me there was a good-looking piano. I made up my mind I would be living under the Gregory roof before the week was out.

The few months I had been in Melbourne, standing on my own feet and fighting the battle of life unaided, had sharpened my wits and made me into a shrewder, more calculating person. This newborn shrewdness came to my aid in dealing with Mrs. Gregory. Unmistakably she was



Invincible Press

My birthplace, Dean's Marsh, Victoria



Sartony



New York Times Studio

As Brünnhilde at Lille, 1931, and at the Metropolitan, 1934

either Irish or of Irish descent. I guessed that any appeal to her would have a better chance to succeed if it were more emotional than logical.

There came a pause in the interview. I sensed it might presage an unfavorable verdict and acted quickly. "Would you like me to sing for you?" I asked.

Before she had time to say yea or nay I had the lid of the piano open and was beginning the introduction to "Killarney." I called upon the spirits of my departed Irish forebears to help me and went right through the three verses of the song, spreading them inches thick with sentiment. I was ashamed when I finished and turned to look at my victim. Tears ran down her cheeks. She came over to where I sat at the piano and put an arm about my shoulder.

"Ah, you have a lovely voice, my dear," she said. "Almighty God has been very good to you. Will you move in tomorrow or at the end of the week?"

I earned every penny of the five shillings a week Mrs. Gregory paid me, but our relationship was warmer than that which usually exists between employer and employee. She had a daughter and son of her own who were about my age. Their main occupation at the moment seemed to be chasing a good time. Mrs. Gregory was surprised that any girl should so earnestly desire a career as to make the sacrifices I did to prepare for it. After a few weeks in the Gregory home I began to feel very much at peace with the world. My contentment was reflected in my singing. I knew, and Boustead admitted, we were making progress.

Learning singing, though, is like a mother's work: it is never done. You make a discovery, effect an improvement,

and the possibility, the very necessity, for half a dozen more improvements stand revealed, compelling you to come to grips with them. Under Boustead my technique did develop and he showed me a good deal about interpretation. In later years I realized how fortunate I was to have chosen him for a teacher.

For every honest person who teaches singing there are a hundred charlatans. I have been in most countries and have found impostors teaching singing (or professing to) in all of them. Australia is no more free from this pestilence than any other part of the world and I shudder to think of the number of beautiful natural voices they destroy.

It was a lucky day for me when I found my way to Ivor Boustead's studio. He is honest and conscientious. His ability is testified to by the number of outstanding Australian singers to whose vocal careers he has given a sound beginning. I never have had to unlearn anything he taught me. When Madame Cécile Gilly accepted me into her Paris studio, she took up where Boustead left off.

I knew no language other than English when I began my lessons with Boustead. When we began to work on Italian opera he taught me the text as he would a parrot; he made the sounds and I imitated him. I was very impressed with myself when I began to sing "in Italian." I sounded so professional!

My self-satisfaction faded, however, when I realized how silly it was for me to sing words whose meaning I did not understand. I reproached myself as a fraud and my intelligence revolted at continuing to sing "in Italian" until I learned something of the language. So I began taking lessons and fairly quickly developed a not too bad grasp

of Italian—at least of poetic Italian, the kind in which songs and opera are written. There is a difference, as I discovered on my first visit to Italy, between that kind of Italian and the workaday language of normal conversation.

I made this discovery in Rome while on a student holiday from Paris. I was accompanied by a French friend, Mimi Grodet. We went into a most attractive café and it was not until we had been seated at a table and I had vainly searched the menu for some familiar-sounding dish that I was confronted by the fact that although I sang and understood a number of Italian operatic roles, I did not know enough of the language to order lunch.

"Do not worry," said Mimi when I confessed my lingual inadequacy. "Waiters everywhere know French. *I* shall order."

But Mimi was wrong: no waiter in that cafe happened to know a word of French. Mimi, the waiter and I looked at each other in utter helplessness. The café was busy, the waiter's Roman gorge was rising, and worst of all, my hunger was aggravated by the sight and smell of piles of wonderful food being carried past us to other tables. Just as our waiter was about to abandon us in high dudgeon, a phrase from the libretto of *Tosca* came, like the answer to a prayer, into my mind.

"*O Mario,*" I began, "*consenti ch'io parli? Che v'ho fatto in vita mia? Son io che cosi torturate!*" ("Mario, let me speak? What wrong have I done to you in my life? It is I that you torture so!")

The angry look on the waiter's face gave way to one of complete bewilderment as his mind strove to discover the meaning of my words. As he caught the gist of them his

bewilderment gave way to sympathy and with his full co-operation I was able to order an excellent meal. As he smilingly departed with our order in the direction of the kitchen, I sped him on his way with another line from the last act of *Tosca*—"*Mario, su, presto! Andiamo!*" ("Quickly, get up, Mario. Let's go.")

But to return to Melbourne and my studies. No sooner had I begun to take Italian lessons than I decided my English diction could be improved also and I took myself to an elocution teacher, Mostyn Wright, in the hope that he could rectify my shortcomings in this direction. Learning to understand as well as sing Italian was one of the wisest things I did during my early studenthood, but my excursion into the elocutionists' field nearly ended my singing career.

I always had nursed a secret ambition to be a tragedy queen and I saw this ambition being realized in the performances of Shakespearean plays which Mostyn Wright put on in the Melbourne Assembly Hall for the pleasure and delight of the friends and relatives of his students. I was the biggest "ham" who ever trod a board. I cultivated a speaking voice for my theatrical appearances that was pitched about a minor third below my normal speech. Heaven knows for how long this nonsense would have gone on if Boustead had not stopped it. After a particularly long and exciting rehearsal of *Merchant of Venice*, in which the qualities of mercy might not have been strained but my poor voice was, I went to Boustead for a singing lesson. I was barely able to speak.

"What in God's name have you been doing?" he asked after I had croaked a scale.

I confessed.

He told me bluntly I could continue to study singing with him or be leading lady with the Mostyn Wright Players. But I had to make a choice. The particular brand of elocuting in which I was indulging, Mr. Boustead pointed out, was not conducive to good singing. As a matter of dire fact, if I persisted with it I would destroy whatever voice I still possessed.

It was not difficult for me to make my choice: singing was my career. But it was not without a pang that I bade farewell to the dramatic stage. Performing in public had a complete fascination for me and during my student days in Melbourne I craved an audience. It did not matter very much whether I sang to it, acted or did a dance, so long as I held the stage. Boustead realized this.

"Now you be a sensible girl," he advised me. "Give your voice a rest and we will begin work again. Don't be impatient. It will not be very long before you have all the people coming to hear you that your exhibitionist heart could possibly desire."

After four or five days, during which I spoke barely above a whisper, I returned to Boustead. I sang some exercises and a couple of songs. He told me my voice had recovered from its Shakespearean abuses and that I was nearly ready to begin singing in public. He went on to say that the Geelong Musical Competitions would be taking place a few months later. He thought I should enter for all the vocal contests open to me.

If, I told myself, Boustead thought I was good enough to sing as one of his students at Geelong, I knew he must have a very good opinion of my work. The contests at Geelong were among the most important of several annual musical contests held in Australia, and singers and instrumentalists

from all over the country came to take part in them. I also knew that competing at Geelong would involve a tremendous amount of preparatory hard work. If I were to make a sufficiently sensational splash to attract national attention, I would have to enter for at least a dozen separate contests and win all of them. I did not have to tell Boustead this. He had prepared other singers—including John Brownlee—for competitions.

Boustead did not think it would be feasible for me to keep on with my job at Mrs. Gregory's and devote the necessary time to prepare for the contests. We discussed this at length until finally he came out with what I think he had in mind throughout our discussion: He offered to write to Father, telling him he believed I had a genuine talent and that he thought I should sing at Geelong, adding that being a Jane-of-All-Work at a suburban boarding-house was not the most suitable occupation for a young woman about to take what conceivably could be the first steps toward a distinguished singing career. Boustead urged my father to let me return home and be given a chance to show what I could do.

The letter arrived at Winchelsea just before Christmas. The timing was perfect. My sentimental old father was not overhappy at the prospect of celebrating Christmas with Cyril and me away from home and he replied to Boustead, telling him he would have me back and permit me to continue my lessons with the idea of competing at Geelong. If, however, I failed to win at Geelong, he expected me to give up the idea of becoming a singer.

I had no hesitation in accepting the bargain. Cyril and I went home. Australians are not very emotional—not obviously so, at any rate—but our welcome was warm. No-

body would admit that there was any relation between the two events, but a day or two before our return Dad had taken the Model T to the local garage and traded it in for a spanking new model.

"The old fella was about through," he told us when he picked us up at the station.

He fooled nobody. We knew the new car was part of the celebration of our home-coming and we were deeply touched.

It was a wonderful Christmas. Christmas always was a very special time to us, and Cyril and I had been dreading spending one away from the rest of the family. We were very happy to be together again and I never before had loved them all so dearly.

But even in the midst of eating the fatted calf, and the general jollification over the prodigals' return, I was preoccupied with thinking about my chances of winning at Geelong a few months later. Success was the narrow tightrope between me and a singing career. I could not afford to slip. There would be no net to catch me if I did.

7. Vocal Victory

AFTER MY return from Melbourne, my family behaved as though it had made up its mind that I was already on the road to vocal fame. Even Father allotted me what normally was regarded as "light duty" on the farm. Apart from milking half a dozen cows every morning, my time was almost my own. Twice a week I went to Melbourne for lessons, catching the seven o'clock train after having been up at five to keep my appointment with the cows.

Milking cows, by the way, is not so arduous a job as city people imagine. It some ways resembles knitting. Once you get the knack of it you can do it almost without concentration, your mind being left completely free to think about other things. And there were plenty of other things for me to think about just then.

Ivor Boustead decided I should enter for fourteen separate events at Geelong, including the one to decide the best singer of an operatic aria. The aria contest was to take place at the end of the competitions, and formed the climax to the festival. Accumulated prizes for the aria winner were higher than they had ever been: besides the regular prize offered by the citizens' committee sponsoring the competitions, a Melbourne newspaper, the *Sun-Pictorial,* had donated an extra substantial cash prize and guaranteed the winner well-paid radio and theater engagements.

Australians work up an excited interest in the nation's

major musical contests and the newspapers devote as much space to them as the New York City press might to a major boxing bout at Madison Square Garden.

With the high prizes this particular year—1928—press and public interest in the Geelong festival was extraordinary. Not only would the aria winner be well rewarded in cold cash, but he or she would receive enough publicity to make the earning of a lot more money comparatively easy.

My first appearance at Geelong was in an event in which entrants sang a Scotch song for the seven-guinea prize. I sang "Annie Laurie" and won. My victory elated me, especially when I realized that in the three minutes it had taken me to sing "Annie Laurie," I had earned as much money as I would doing approximately thirty weeks work for Mrs. Gregory. I went on to win the solo for women who never had won a first prize in competitions, the contralto championship, the prize for an excerpt from oratorio, and everything else for which I entered. But the aria contest was still in the offing.

The day on which I had to sing my aria began badly. The cows were utterly nonco-operative and one kicked over a nearly full pail of milk, but that dear friend of the Lawrence family, Mrs. Lillian ("Auntie Lill") Batson, saved me the thirty-mile train trip to Geelong by driving me down in her car. I arrived at the hall long before I had to sing and suffered the tortures of the damned as I sat and listened to other competitors. Here was a tenor sobbing his heart out with "Vesti la Giubba," a light and airy soprano chirruping through the coloratura tricks of "Caro Nome," now a dark baritone floating through "Star of Eve."

They sounded magnificent, possibly far, far better than they actually were.

I began an eleventh-hour worry, too, when I heard the spectacular arias other competitors sang. Had the choice been left to me, I would have chosen "O Don Fatale," but Ivor Boustead insisted I sing the little known and less showy "O, My Heart is Weary" from Goring Thomas's *Nadeshda.* Boustead knew what he was about. His choice was sound. It gave me the opportunity to demonstrate the compass of my voice and many facets of my technique.

When my turn came to sing, my apprehensions vanished and I did not need the audience's applause to know that I had sung well. I succeeded in doing everything I attempted in the aria and I was certain I could not have sung better. With a glow of satisfaction, I left the hall and went to spend the rest of the day at a friend's home in Geelong. The contest would go on all day and into the night. An official told me as I walked out through the foyer of the hall that the result should be known about 9:30 P.M.

I do not know how I survived the day. Time moved slowly. I had a little dinner and then left my friend's house to wander round the streets. As I passed a church I heard a choir singing and went inside. A service was taking place. I stayed there, listening, until it was ended and then walked back to the hall.

The singing was over. The flood of opera at last had ceased. Like Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger,* in his tent-like enclosure the adjudicator who had heard every note was scratching away at a pad preparing his verdict; at least he was alive to tell the tale. Everybody—the singers and the supporters of their "stables"—was tense with excitement.

Most of the competitors had returned to hear the result. The most optimistic had put on formal evening clothes, knowing that the winner would have to repeat his or her aria for the huge audience after the decision was announced. I was still wearing my farm girl's best, a coat and skirt I had made from tough Australian cloth. My wardrobe in those days did not run to an evening gown.

I walked into the hall and sat with the other competitors. I was quite surprised when an official who had been talking with the adjudicator greeted me very warmly, saying, "I am so glad you came back." I should have known there and then that I had won.

The adjudicator slid back his curtains and the chattering stopped as though everyone had been simultaneously gagged. He climbed onto the stage. Now the moment that a hundred hopeful hearts had anticipated had arrived. So hushed was the vast old hall that the noise of the judge walking to the middle of the platform echoed violently in our ears.

My eyes could not leave the short, red-faced man with the long Irish upper lip as he began to speak. I suffered agonies defying description as he summed up. Without naming the competitor he lavished flamboyant praise on the singer, and my suffering became even more excruciating because his comments could have applied to me—or to a dozen others.

This adjudicator, Thorold Waters, the knowledgeable and extremely literary music critic of the *Sun-Pictorial,* is the most enthusiastic and diligent hunter of good voices I have ever met. Throughout the years I have lived in Europe and the United States, Thorold Waters through his informative letters has been a veritable voice of Australia

to me. He has always kept me informed of musical developments in the land of my birth. I owe a big debt of gratitude to Thorold Waters and, for that matter, so does Australian music in general.

But that night at Geelong it was Thorold Waters himself who was playing a role and he gave it everything he had. Not only was it for him to decide on the best singer but it was also in his power to give the audience its money's worth by making the event as exciting and dramatic as possible. After a protracted preamble about opera, the *Sun-Pictorial,* singers and musical competitions in general, he finally got around to mentioning the number (all of us had numbers) of one contestant. Such glowing things he said about her performance that for a time we imagined she had won. How thankful I was that I was not that singer when I heard Thorold Waters say, "And to that competitor we give honorable mention." We applauded her.

On he went to praise others who had earned honorable mention. Then, drawing upon his stupendous repertoire of adjectives and similes, Thorold Waters named the singers to whom he had awarded third and second prizes. My number had not been mentioned. I would rather go on the rack than suffer again as I did while the Waters' oratory flowed on. Several times I was on the verge of fleeing the hall.

With the "place" and "show" positions decided, Thorold Waters mopped his brow and sipped a glass of water. Striking a theatrical pose, he went on to the climax of his performance. In those elegant phrases that have made his name a byword on Australia's copy desks, he began to talk about a competitor for whom he predicted an operatic career as brilliant as any an Australian had ever enjoyed.

He likened the quality of her voice to gold, to silver, to steel; he eulogized her temperament, her musicianship. I did not dare to hope it was I about whom he was talking. I knew I was good, but not that good.

When my nerves were just at breaking point and the miserable handkerchief I had been tearing at with both hands was about to give up the ghost, Thorold Waters said: "And that singer, ladies and gentlemen, is Number Twenty-eight!"

Twenty-eight. That was my number. I had won! Now lagging time stood still. I came back to reality as the audience began to applaud. Thorold Waters beckoned and I managed to walk out onto the stage and shake his hand. My life since then has not been uneventful. It has been my lot to savor the full sweet and bitterness of most human experiences. But my most exciting moment was when I realized that I had won the aria contest at Geelong. My only regret was that neither my mother nor father was there to share my triumph and happiness.

Radios were not numerous in Australia in 1928 and there was none at our home. Mrs. Batson and I got back to Winchelsea round about two o'clock next morning. Everyone was waiting up for us. I thanked God that I had won. When I saw all those tired inquiring faces I realized what an unhappy business it would have been if I had had to tell them I had lost. My father made no attempt to hide his joy at my success and we talked until dawn. Then someone, I forget who, rode into Winchelsea to get the early newspapers from Melbourne. I never did find out who milked the cows that morning.

The papers were full of me. There was an interview with me in one. I could not remember having given it, but what

it purported me to have said sounded reasonable. The newspaper fellows made much of the fact that I was a farm girl, and they did not spare my feelings in describing my appearance or dress. Dad read every word and then went out and got on his gray mare and rode into Winchelsea. There, in true Australian tradition, he celebrated the happiness in his home by buying pots of beer for all who came into the Winchelsea pub that day. Before the celebrations were over, Bill Lawrence was letting it be known he thought his daughter had a voice that would take her round the world.

When spring came my brothers had renewed reason for recalling my Geelong triumph. The competitions took place during the season when farmers in our district plant their wheat. On the day I sang in the aria contest, my brother Lindsay was operating the drilling machine in one of our best paddocks. No wheat came up in that paddock that year. An examination showed no seed had been sown. My father questioned Lindsay. He admitted he had not been thinking about the paddock. He had been so preoccupied worrying about me and what I was trying to do in Geelong that he had forgotten to push into position the gadget on the driller that lets the seed flow. Until the next harvest that gap in our fields remained a starkly vivid memorial to my success.

Though I now felt I had had quite a little musical experience, it was not until just a few weeks before I left Australia for France that I saw my first opera, *Aïda,* still one of my favorites and an opera in which I have sung not only the title role, but that of Amneris many times and in many countries. I had quite a good idea of the Aïda role

and knew the music of the entire opera fairly well long before that night when I first saw it performed.

The business of seeing an opera come to life was very thrilling and when I heard the soprano sing "Ritorna Vincitor," I wondered whether I would ever take part in an operatic performance. Even if I never did, I felt I had gone some of the way that night in Melbourne by singing to myself every note and word of the role with the singer on the stage. A few nights later I heard *Lucia.* These are the only two operas I have ever heard performed in my own country.

Opera seasons are few and far between in Australia and many an Australian singer has gone abroad and found operatic fame without ever having seen a complete opera at home. Incongruously, in a country fabulously rich with vocal talent, no one has yet been competent to finance and organize regular operatic seasons.

I think that the stumbling block has been that Australians will be satisfied with nothing but the best musically. Geographically isolated as they are from the operatic centers of the world, they have become acquainted with opera—and other serious music—through gramophone records primarily, and more recently through radio.

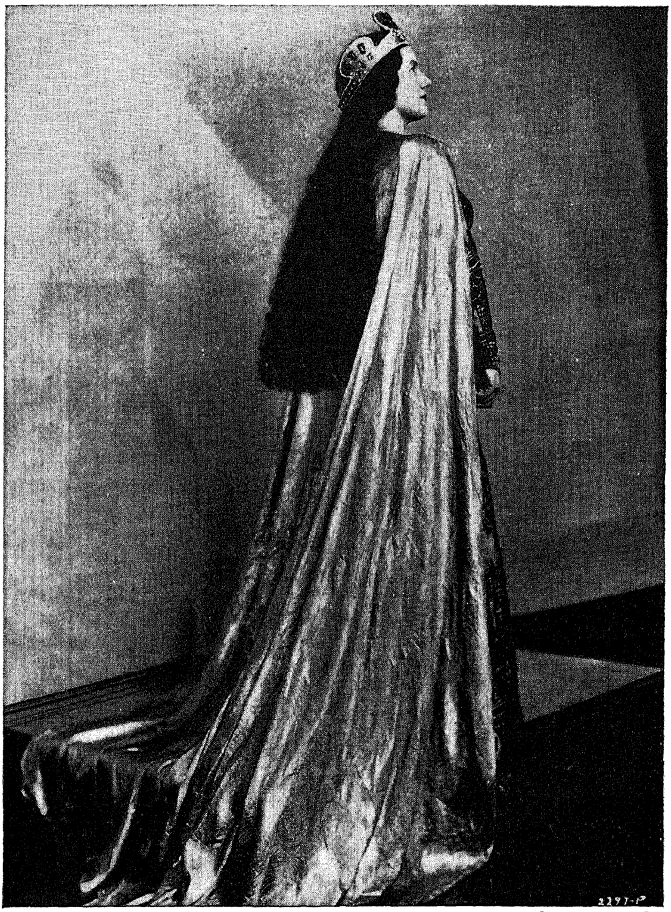
Over the years the Australian music lover has built up fabulously high musical standards. Anything less than the best opera company would be a financial flop in Australia. People would rather stay home and listen to their recordings than go to the theater to hear a second-rate performance. An entrepreneur, therefore, contemplating an Australian opera season, would have to be prepared to transport the world's best singers and conductors to the Com-

monwealth—as Melba and J. C. Williamson Ltd., did once or twice and made money.

Musicians, particularly singers, whose powers are waning and those who fall short of being "the best" should not go to Australia and hope to satisfy Australian concertgoers. And singers who have recorded should not venture to sing in the Commonwealth unless their art be at least as perfect as it was when they made their recordings. The mass of Australian concertgoers wants everything from a singer: a good voice, the best songs, a platform personality and a cast-iron constitution. The latter is tremendously important because Australian concert managements and audiences expect an artist to perform three, and very often four, times a week. Sydney and Melbourne—each of which has a population over the million mark—can always turn out payable audiences for a worthwhile artist three times in one week and in the case of most visiting "celebrities" (as the Australians call imported performers), six times in two consecutive weeks.

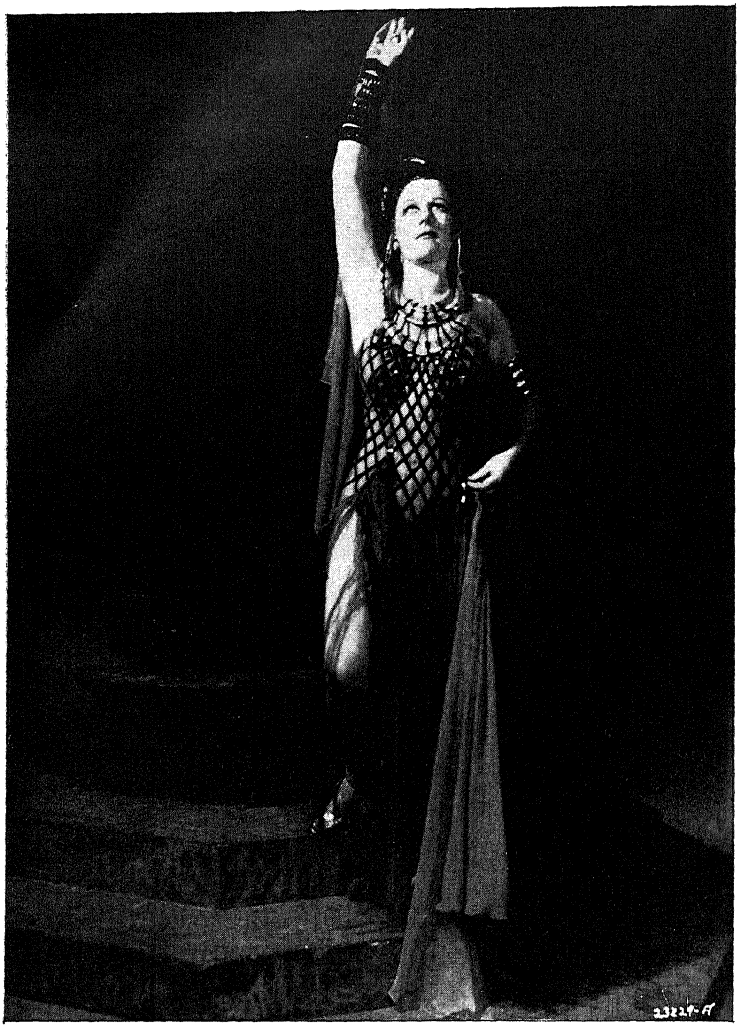
The organization of the Australian Broadcasting Commission in the early days of radio, long before the nation's present Labor Government came to power, has had an important influence in raising the musical standards of the people. The Commission's sternest opposition in the concert field comes from the old Australian firm of J. & N. Tait (now an affiliate of J. C. Williamson Ltd., whom I mentioned as having staged opera seasons with Melba).

Every Australian who owns a radio must pay a nominal annual license fee to operate it. With its share from these fees, the Commission has organized symphony orchestras in every Australian capital city and imported famous conductors and musicians to appear with them. These



New York Times Studio

As Ortrud in *Lohengrin*, Metropolitan, 1934



New York Times Studio

As Salome, Metropolitan, 1936

importations have included people like Eugene Goossens (now permanent leader of the Sydney Symphony), Georg Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Eugene Ormandy, Lotte Lehmann (whose superb artistry was so much admired), Artur Rubenstein, Artur Schnabel, Alexander Kipnis, Richard Tauber, Isaac Stern, Eileen Joyce, William Kapell, and many others.

Among the big names Taits' have taken to Australia are Chaliapin—an acid test for any entrepreneur's skill—Heifetz, Lawrence Tibbett (and how happy I was that my fellow countrymen gave this talented colleague and staunch supporter the warm welcome they did), Richard Crooks (who gave programs of glorious music and earned himself a small fortune), Menuhin, Flagstad, and another sensational success, John Charles Thomas. Even as I write this I am preparing programs for the sixty concerts I have contracted to give under the Tait banner in Australia and New Zealand this year.

8. Going Abroad

I WON THE aria contest in May. By October I was on my way to Paris. The Australian people were satisfied that I was an outstanding singer—or soon would be—and the wildest forecasts were made about what I would achieve.

Everyone I met wanted to help me—or almost everyone. The then Lord Mayor of Geelong, Alderman Hitchcock, boasted that he was a friend of Dame Nellie Melba and undertook to arrange for me to sing for her. He felt sure she would use her influence in helping me on my way.

Alderman Hitchcock knew Melba all right and did ask her to hear me—several times. Each time I saw him I asked when the audition would be. He never could reply. Finally he was obliged to tell me: "I'm sorry, my dear, but you will have to do without Dame Nellie's help. The trouble seems to be that you wear skirts."

Wonderful, wonderful Melba! I regard some of her recordings as models of vocal perfection, but she was woman—and a singer—all through. She must have realized by 1928 that the sparkle had left her voice, but she kept on singing and resented the very existence of any other woman singer, especially an Australian, who showed any signs of achieving even a fraction of the fame she had enjoyed for so very, very long.

I hope that when the time comes for me to give up singing, when the years take their inevitable toll, I will be

sensible enough to realize my day is done. It is a sad aspect of a singer's existence to see and hear former great exponents of the vocal art who keep on inflicting themselves upon the public although their voices are gone. Too many singers, alas, cling with stiff, old fingers to a dead bouquet of once lovely blooms.

Even at Covent Garden, scene of so many of her triumphs, it is the pathetic days of Melba's last performances and not her earlier splendid singing of Puccini, Mozart, Verdi and Gounod that so many people remember. When I sang there in 1946, knowing I was an Australian one of the bewigged, silk-coated attendants whose function it is to open and close the curtains of the opera house stage regaled me with anecdotes of Melba's last appearance at Covent Garden, the farewell that ended all farewells.

Among other things, she gave a miraculous performance of an act from *La Bohême* that night. "Of course, the voice was not what it had been," my storyteller said, "but parts of it were good enough to remind us how perfect a thing it had been. As she finished singing, Melba seemed terribly overcome. If you have heard the recordings made that night, you will know the house was overwhelmed.

"We could see that Melba was weeping as she took her bows, dozens of them. She seemed so distressed as she walked back into the wings that we feared she might collapse. So finally I signaled my colleague to hold the curtains together and not to reopen them. I was standing with him when Melba, in a flash, made a complete recovery, although there were real tears on her cheeks, and hissed at us, 'Pull back those bloody curtains at once!'

"We did, and there she was out before the audience before you could say Jack Robinson, bowing and sob-

bing all over again. Ah, she was always a woman of the Theater through and through."

But even if Dame Nellie would not listen to me sing, there were thousands of other Australians who were eager to do so. My concerts drew tremendous crowds and my broadcasts were well received.

Moreover, a new Australian star had risen in the operatic sky. John Brownlee, who only a few years before had gone abroad an aspiring student from Geelong, had returned in near triumph from his successes at the Paris Opéra and other celebrated European musical centers. He had come home a cultured and sophisticated artist to receive the acclaim of his own people. Graciously and without fuss he said he would be delighted to hear me.

Jokes made by competitors and other people during the Geelong competitions about my clothing and farm-girl appearance had determined me to make myself more attractive. But I had been so busy since my victory that there had been no time to do anything about it. I was, therefore, very conscious of my plump figure and rough dress the day I sang for John Brownlee, but this did not affect my singing. By then "O Don Fatale" was something of a favorite with me, so I did that for him. Without hearing any more but, I hope, realizing what he was letting himself in for, Brownlee urged me to get to Paris as quickly as I could. He promised to help me become a student of Madame Cécile Gilly, wife of his own teacher, Dinh Gilly.

It was the first time anyone had mentioned my going to Paris since those caravan recitals on the Winchelsea village green.

Brownlee was so friendly that I asked him whether he thought I should take off some weight.

"Good Lord, no," he said. "A big voice like yours needs a substantial body to support it."

Nevertheless, when Brownlee asked me to share a program with him for a Geelong concert, I determined to look as shapely and attractive as possible for the occasion.

Lady Mayoress Hitchcock and Ada Boddington knew more about dressing than anyone else I knew. I told them about my concert with Brownlee and begged them to help me make the best of myself. The alacrity with which they agreed to help should have been a warning.

First, they got hold of a very long corset into which I was laced several times before the concert and which made me look like a fugitive from a Mack Sennett comedy. Then, because those two excellent women believed all singers should have "high chests," they insisted on encompassing my breasts in one of those old-fashioned bodices, the lacy, bony, uncomfortable precursor of the modern brassiere. When this latter monstrosity was put on me at a dress rehearsal, it gave me the appearance of a very cross pouter pigeon. How I managed to sing at all with these contraptions strapped about me I will never know. Yet I did—and well enough, I think, to persuade John Brownlee I would be worth helping if and when I got to Paris. But I must have looked terrible.

I still have the frock I wore over my "harness" at that Geelong concert. At Lord Mayor Hitchcock's store, where it was bought for fifteen guineas, they claimed it was a "genuine Paris model." Very pink and heavily beaded, it was the first evening dress I ever owned. I took this "genuine Paris model" back with me to the city of its vaunted origin, but never saw anything a bit like it there. It was hanging in a closet in my Paris apartment when I came to

New York just before the war and was still there when I returned to sing at the Paris Opéra in 1946—one of my few French possessions the Germans did not bother to steal.

After Brownlee had put his seal of approval on my singing, Father dropped his last objection to my being a singer. Already his defenses had been weakened by the Geelong concert. He told me that if I wished to take Brownlee's advice and study with Madame Gilly, he would foot the bills. So it was decided. From then on, there was no holding me.

I sang all over Australia to raise what money I could for my trip. Father made one stipulation: he would not let me travel abroad alone. Some woman would have to go with me and remain with me until I was settled in Paris. Father had a very poor opinion of the morals of Frenchmen. If his daughter was going to risk her virtue by going among them, she must have whatever protection he could provide.

We went through the list of relatives who might go with me. My sister Eileen was the obvious choice, but she was a real homebody and was reluctant to leave the family. For various reasons all other relatives were ruled out. I then nominated Mrs. Boddington and, although Father never could overlook her being a "red-ragger," he agreed that she should go along.

With Alderman Hitchcock using his influence with the shipping company, we got a de luxe cabin on the Commonwealth liner *Jervis Bay,* sunk by the Germans in World War II after a gallant battle, and sailed from Melbourne one bleak, unforgettable October afternoon. As the time of departure drew near and all the preparations and fare-

well concerts were over, I had time to be sad at leaving my family and my country.

I realized how irrevocable a step I had taken when I saw a gang of sailors haul up the gangway of the *Jervis Bay*. There was no turning back now. Down on the dock in a melancholy group stood my family and friends hanging on to the bunch of paper streamers, the opposite ends of which Mrs. Boddington and I gripped in our hands.

I looked at Dad. He was standing a little apart from the rest, his hands deep in his overcoat pockets. He looked up at me with an unhappy smile and, as he did so, I had a fearful premonition I would never see him again. I remembered a promise I had made him to sing his favorite song "Turn Ye To Me" as the boat pulled away from the dock.

Tears blinded me as I sang, but I finished the song. As I did, the group on the dock sang back "God Be With You Till We Meet Again."

The last paper streamer had snapped and the *Jervis Bay* was out in the stream, its prow pointing towards the open sea as the last notes of the farewell came across the water to us. I rushed down to my cabin and cried myself to sleep.

Next day those fading notes of "God Be With You Till We Meet Again" haunted my ears, but my grief at parting from my dear ones was less acute than it had been the day before. Much as I loved them, the adventure of a first sea trip gripped me.

Ada Boddington lost no time in settling down to shipboard life. She seemed to know everybody on board before I had even found my sea legs. "Boddy" was very popular—especially with one good-looking officer—and I was left pretty much to myself during the first days out. As I have

said, Ada Boddington is a bright, intelligent woman and skilled in many things, but as a chaperone she was a flop.

And how I needed chaperoning before that five-week trip was over!

A fellow passenger was an athletic-looking young Englishman whose name was William Baker. He told me he was in the diamond business somewhere near Johannesburg, South Africa, and had been on a trip to New Zealand. Baker was one of those rare Englishmen whose skins take kindly to the antipodean sun. Tanned, a smart dresser and endowed with social graces usually lacking in the Australian male, Baker completely captured my heart.

The languorous tropic seas through which we sailed, the carefree shipboard life, the colorful ports like Colombo and Port Said that we "explored," and the usual romantic atmosphere of a sea voyage were his allies. I realized for the first time the full meaning and utter truthfulness of a piece of Australian bush philosophy I had overheard on one occasion—that no woman is the same if she has fifty fathoms of water beneath her. But even if Bill Baker did make a conquest, his own emotions did not emerge unscathed from the fray. Throughout the trip he was my constant and very ardent companion, his passion cooling only when I told him with complete truthfulness that I was a virgin.

9. Innocents Abroad

IF YOU had been near the Gare Saint-Lazare about noon on the wet mid-December day of 1928 that Ada Boddington and I arrived in Paris you might have glimpsed two of the least chic women in that fashion-conscious metropolis. "Boddy" was bundled up in a rough-and-ready cut Australian tweed coat and skirt and I was wearing one of my homemade Winchelsea "models."

Beneath it I was encompassed by a heavy suit of underwear made from prime Australian merino wool and consisting of a singlet and large baggy bloomers (or drawers) fastened at the knees with elastic. Father had insisted that I bring several such outfits to protect me against the European cold. They did that, all right, but did not improve the outlines of my quite substantial silhouette.

Neither "Boddy" nor I could speak French and Paris scared us stiff! We hesitated even to give our suitcases to a porter. Our travel and accommodation had been booked through Cook's and we knew there was a reservation for us at the Hotel Sainte Anne. Apart from the fact that we had been assured that the hotel was near the Paris Opéra, we knew nothing about it.

After a circuitous taxi ride (and who could blame any taxi driver for not getting all he could from two such bumpkins) we arrived at the hotel. It was a thoroughly charming little place, but I had no mind to appreciate its

attractiveness. The Paris Opéra was nearby, I knew, and I demanded, even before we had unpacked our bags, that "Boddy" come out with me while I "found" it.

To my way of thinking the Paris Opéra is the most beautiful in the world. There is no other whose appearance and atmosphere are so right for its purpose. As Ada Boddington and I turned from the side street in which our hotel was situated into the Avenue de l'Opéra, I gasped as I saw its vast ornate loveliness shimmering in the winter sunlight.

I felt as a pilgrim must when he reaches Mecca, as Parsifal did when he beheld the Grail. I was frightened and exalted and very close to panic. This, I told myself, was the place in which I, Marjorie Lawrence of Winchelsea, aspired to sing. Me sing in this tremendous, palacelike place! The idea was preposterous. I was a fool. I would go back home immediately. That was the first of many times I was to make that decision in Paris.

The Opéra occupies a full city block. With the faithful Boddington padding silently a pace or so behind me, I walked slowly round it, gazing rapturously at its richly ornamented façades. I did not dare enter one of its several foyers. And it was many weeks before I did.

Without speaking, "Boddy" and I crept back to the hotel. I suspected that she, like me, felt I had presumed too much.

Luckily my self-confidence never deserts me for very long. Next morning I had forgotten all about going home to Australia and was striving to discover from the hotel clerk whether any message had come for me from "Monsieur Jean Brownlee." We had kept Brownlee informed of our plans and it had been arranged that he would get in

touch with us at the Sainte Anne. With a waving of hands and a shaking of his head, the clerk made it clear that he understood my request, but there was no message from Monsieur Brownlee.

I spent most of that day, too, wandering about in the vicinity of the opera house.

For three unhappy days we waited, but no word came from Brownlee. On the third day I looked up Brownlee's number in the phone book and wrote it down on a piece of paper. In Australia I had become quite friendly with the baritone and felt I knew him very well, but here in Paris it was different and I hesitated to call him. Perhaps seeing his name on the posters outside the opera house was responsible for my holding him in some kind of awe. I tortured myself with thoughts that Brownlee had forgotten all about me. If he had, I thought, my trip might well have been in vain.

Finally I could bear the uncertainty no longer. I grabbed the telephone and asked the operator to get Brownlee's number. John's sister Jess, who had come to Paris to take care of him, answered and when I told her who I was and what I wanted she sounded a shade chilly. Didn't I know that the poor boy had been seriously ill with influenza? Far too ill to worry about me or anyone else. How dare I trouble him at such a time!

How I might have known this I could not see, and Jess Brownlee might have heard some strong Australian expressions if she had not added that Brownlee had arranged an audition for me with Madame Gilly for later in the week.

A couple of days later, long ahead of the appointed time, I arrived at Madame Gilly's house, number 58 rue

de la Rochefoucauld, and climbed up the stairway to the third-floor studio. I was ushered into a large, theater-like room where a beautiful, very dignified middle-aged woman sat at a piano. Standing talking to her was John Brownlee. I was dressed just as I had been when I arrived in Paris. What with worrying about my arrangements with Brownlee and my pilgrimages to the opera house, I had had neither the time nor the inclination to buy new clothes.

I was nervous and awkward, and realized when I contemplated the stately Cécile Gilly how badly dressed I was. John Brownlee, thank goodness, having been through the mill himself not so very long before, understood how I felt. He strode over and shook my hand, said all the right reassuring things and introduced me to Madame Gilly. As my French was still limited to about a dozen words and Madame Gilly spoke no English, there could be no small talk. I placed my by now very well-worn copy of "O Don Fatale" on the piano and began to sing.

Apart from a few timid chirrupings in my hotel room, I had not sung since I got off the boat in England. The rest had not done my voice any harm. Fortunately, whenever I have to rise to an occasion, to sing a little better than usual, I am generally able to do so. This audition was an occasion which called for my very best.

"Ah, une vraie soprano dramatique . . . une soprano Wagnérienne!" Madame Gilly exclaimed when I had sung.

I looked at Brownlee and the expression on his handsome face told me that he, too, thought I had done well.

"Mais oui, mais oui," snapped Madame Gilly when Brownlee asked if she would have me as a pupil. I knew what those four words meant, but I was unable to get a

hint of what Madame said in the verbal torrent that followed. Brownlee had to translate.

Madame liked my voice and was sure she could shape and develop it, he said. But there were other things I would have to learn besides singing and music. A student must not live in a hotel. I would have to live with a French family and not only learn to speak the language but also assimilate as much as I could of the French culture. She knew the place for me: the home of Madame Grodet de Lacretelle, which was number 27 Avenue Trudaine. I should call there next day. I would be expected. As soon as I was settled in, our lessons could begin.

Returning to the Hotel Sainte Anne that afternoon, I looked the Opéra fairly and squarely in the face. No longer was I intimidated. Madame Gilly's reaction to my singing had greatly restored my confidence. Perhaps the day would come when my name would be on the posters at the Opéra entrance.

Ada Boddington and I went to the Grodet home next day and found it a pleasant old place manifesting an unmistakable impression that its occupants had seen better times. The Grodets, we discovered, were one of those families who had suffered financial setbacks but who, despite the calamity, retained what the English call their "form." To bolster their income they took in foreign students as pensioners.

Madame and Monsieur Grodet, with their daughter Mimi and son Henri, were used to having students from many countries living under their roof. But they admitted, when we came to know each other better, that they did wonder what they had on their hands when I arrived. My inability to speak French did not help. Whenever I

was spoken to my only reply was an inane giggle. If this giggling were not sufficient to cause the family to ponder on the soundness of my mind, my bland announcement that I had come to Paris to sing at the Opéra was.

During my first days in Paris, remembering Father's warning about Frenchmen's morals, I regarded Henri as a threat to my virtue and refused to venture from my room, even to go down the passageway to the family bathroom, unless convoyed by Mrs. Boddington. There was no concealing from the Grodets the reason for this precaution. It puzzled Papa Grodet because I permitted another pensioner, Einar Johanssen, to come to my room whenever he pleased. Frenchman though he was, this shocked the old man.

Einar Johanssen was a Danish piano student and a most promising artist. It was not his musical skill, however, but his ability to speak English that prompted me to have him in for an occasional chat. While I was with the Grodets, Einar went to Germany to continue his studies. I did not hear of him again until 1946 when I was in London. He heard me in a British Broadcasting Commission performance of *Tristan und Isolde* with Sir Thomas Beecham, and wrote asking if I were the girl he had known in Paris. Einar is now an outstanding pianist in Scandinavia and has asked me to make a joint recital tour of those countries with him. I hope we can sometime.

*

10. Cécile Gilly

NOT SINCE their famous "method" was drawing aspiring singers from all over the world to the studio of Jean and Edouard de Reszke has there been a singing teacher to enjoy so wide an international reputation as Cécile Gilly. If she had not been a totally unselfish woman who fell in love with and married another singer, musicians might remember her as a performer rather than a teacher.

They still talk about her at the Paris Conservatoire and tell how she won every distinction and award open to her during her days there. She was on the brink of what promised to be a most spectacular career when she fell in love with the then rising young baritone, Dinh Gilly. They married and, generous-hearted, infatuated soul that she was, Cécile Gilly held back her career to help her husband with his.

After some success in Paris, the Gillys came to New York and Cécile as well as her husband won American admiration—especially after Toscanini heard her sing and gave her his accolade. The doors of the Metropolitan were opening to her when Cécile had to give up singing to have her first baby. Dinh strode on his way.

Not only did he win the plaudits of New York operagoers, but he roused the romantic interest of the soprano Emmy Destinn, then at the zenith of her career. Destinn took the baritone under her wing. One can appreciate how

he was attracted by the great and beautiful Destinn and the artistic aid she must have given him. From that season on, Dinh Gilly and Destinn sang together all over the world.

Cécile Gilly returned to Paris and stayed there. She always welcomed home her wayward husband when he deigned to visit her in between his tours with Destinn. She never got over her love for him and they had two more children subsequently.

Dinh Gilly often called on his wife while I was studying with her and I can understand completely her infatuation for him. He had the colossal cocksureness of the male prima donna and bore himself as an outstanding man among men. Like his glorious baritone voice, his Algerian handsomeness had weathered well and he was a most amusing conversationalist.

He snorted at people who suggested that I should be submitted to some kind of refining process.

"Leave her alone," he would say. "She is like a fine young horse. For God's sake don't try to tame her. There are too many tame creatures in the world already."

Cécile Gilly, too, found my bounding enthusiasm, happy-go-lucky social behavior and manner of dressing, if not worthy of emulation at least honest and in strict character for me at that time.

I discovered this after I had attended a frilly social function—a tea—given by Jess Brownlee. It was my first experience of such a function in Paris. Several Australians were present, including a young fellow named Archie Longden who was destined to manage my first Australian concert tour in 1939. Archie and the other Australians had been in Paris long enough to dress appropriately for a

"tea" and, as well, had acquired a veneer of Parisian sophistication. I was not immediately conscious of it but, to Jess Brownlee's way of thinking, I possessed neither the clothes nor the manner essential for these occasions.

Jess Brownlee is one of those conscientious hostesses, and she may have imagined that my manners and dress created a bad impression on her guests.

Before I left she gave me some good advice. My hair, naturally curly and very bushy, never had had a "coiffeur." Jess Brownlee insisted it should be thinned out and slicked down in the fashion of the day. My loose-fitting gown was terrible, she said, and should be cast away. To be chic, a gown should cling to the figure.

And as for my flat-heeled shoes . . . Jess made a gesture that was *très, très* French to signify her distaste.

Her words of advice over, she kissed me good-by and said she hoped I had enjoyed myself. Enjoyed myself! I slunk away from the party feeling like a leper, fearing even to be seen by people until I had made the changes urged upon me.

Early next morning I went to a hairdresser and submitted my mop to treatment. I bought a frock that clung so tightly as to leave no doubt about where the Lawrence contours rose and fell. (I had already abandoned my bulky Australian underwear, replacing it with skimpy French bras and lace panties.)

Finally I bought a pair of spike-heeled shoes—the most cramping and uncomfortable pieces of apparel that had tortured my body since the night I had been corseted and brassiered for my Geelong concert with John Brownlee.

The well-mannered Grodets evinced little surprise when I put on my newly acquired finery to go for a lesson. Not

even my slicked-down hair provoked comment. Therefore I was not prepared for the outburst which came from Madame Gilly when I arrived at her studio.

"*Mon Dieu,*" she screamed, leaping up from the piano stool. "What have you done to yourself? Go home. Go home. And do not dare return until you are as you were!"

She refused to give me a lesson and never again in her presence did I consciously try to make myself look like anyone else but Marge Lawrence from Winchelsea.

Cécile Gilly used to say that only about one out of every thousand who came to Paris to study singing had what was needed to go the distance from the studio to the opera house. Many were dispirited when they realized the amount of hard work involved in becoming a singer. Others succumbed to homesickness or the glamor of Paris, and were overwhelmed by the "Bohemian" aspects of studenthood.

I admit I had no idea of the labor involved in becoming a singer. The early drudgery and disappointments nearly caused me to throw in the towel more than once. Those first months with Madame Gilly were a grind. She boasted, quite justifiably, that she was the "flag-bearer of technique." Day after day for many weeks she permitted me to sing nothing but scales and exercises.

I had imagined when I came to Paris that I would begin immediately to work on operatic roles and that after about a year I would make my debut. Hadn't I won the aria contest at Geelong? Didn't I know how to use my voice? A few months with Madame Gilly, however, were sufficient to make me realize I was still a babe in the vocal woods.

When at last she did permit me to sing some arias, they

were excerpts from Rossini and Mozart—calculated still further to strengthen my technique. They were rather tame stuff for me, itching to wallow in the excitements and miseries of *Tosca, Walküre* and *Aïda.*

But from the outset I was sensible enough to have the utmost confidence in my teacher. If my early resentment at her treating me like a novice left scars on my regard for her, these faded as I heard the improvement perpetual vocalizing and scales brought to my voice. Its compass increased. I was always able to control it and its flexibility became far greater.

But Madame Gilly was never satisfied. Any pupil with possibilities who studied with her had her nose kept to the grindstone.

Like most teachers confronted with the obligation of earning a living, Madame Gilly was forced to take as students several people with full purses but very minor talents. Some she discouraged by charging exorbitant fees, but high fees were no deterrent to one woman who contributed substantially to Madame's bankroll. This was Ganna Walska, a Polish socialite. Ganna's obsession was to be a singer. She had married a number of men possessed of great fortunes, most of them Americans, and offered Madame Gilly a fee too high for human refusal. Anyone who heard Mme. Walska in her New York recitals knows what her voice and musicianship were like. But she had sold herself on the idea that she had a musical temperament and *must* sing. I saw something of her in Paris because for a time she took her lessons immediately after me. She always arrived in a sleek black Rolls-Royce driven by a liveried chauffeur and, possibly to demonstrate her musical temperament, always rapped on the door and an-

nounced that my time was up if Madame kept me one moment longer than scheduled.

Cécile Gilly earned every franc she got from Ganna Walska. Several times in later years Madame Gilly told me half-jokingly how she wished to return to the United States but feared that if she did Mme. Walska would give another concert and announce Madame Gilly as her teacher, thus ruining her reputation.

The last I heard of Ganna she had become interested in Yoga and it was said that she was giving concerts for audiences in another world. The box office for such performances cannot be very good—but after all that need not worry Ganna!

11. French Friends

MADAME GILLY knew what she was about when she sent me to live with the Grodets. I was educated and intelligent, but my education was not broad enough nor my intellect sufficiently developed for me to be competent to interpret the vocal literature I was equipped physically to sing.

I listen to singers now and realize how completely a singer exposes his or her soul and mind to a shrewd listener. If you sing in public you must take the risk—if risk it be—of submitting your entire personality to an X-ray examination. Moreover, a singer must be giving out from within herself all the time she is singing. Obviously if there is nothing "in" her, she has nothing to give and, quite regardless of vocal skill, she is a poor artist.

Madame Gilly knew what I lacked. I had a voice, a good voice, a more complete knowledge of the actual science of vocal art than most students, and a dramatic instinct. I had a musical temperament, too. Music roused me. I felt it and could convey this feeling to listeners. These attributes, Madame Gilly realized, were rare gifts. But she knew then, and I know now, that they were not enough.

Because it is an often misused word, I hesitate to write it: but what I lacked was culture. I did not know enough about the way men live and think. The three R's are a

basis for an education, but not an education itself. If I were to become not only a singer but an artist, I would have to expand my education. That was as obvious to Cécile Gilly as the big flat-heeled shoes on my feet. That was why she arranged for me to live with the Grodets.

The Grodets had known more affluent days. Monsieur Grodet had been a millionaire industrialist and the honored and patriotic mayor of the town of Noisy-le-Grand, about twenty miles from Paris. So completely, however, did he devote himself to France's welfare during the First World War that shrewder colleagues and competitors edged him out of his business and when peace finally came he found himself to be financially ruined. Unlike most men who have experienced the comfort and power money brings and then lost the source of those things, Monsieur Grodet was not a gloomy fellow. Rather was he proud and held his head high because, by his diligence and skill, he had been able to pay off all his creditors in full.

His wife, a daughter of the Lacretelle family of the Château de Cormatin, in the Bourgogne, bore the financial calamity equally philosophically, bravely adjusting herself to reduced circumstances. The climate of Madame Grodet's upbringing had been vastly different from mine. In the tradition of the French aristocracy she had been privately educated and had done a great amount of fine writing, verse and prose, people like Lamartine and Victor Hugo having been constant visitors to her family's home. She had impeccable taste in all things and a constant probing interest in art, politics and literature. Needless to add, she spoke exquisite French.

We had been living with the Grodets for only a month

or so when Ada Boddington returned to Australia. With her departure I felt as a child must when it sees its mother leave it behind for its first day at school. Even before her departure, however, the Grodets had demonstrated their complete friendliness and their desire to make me feel "at home."

I have already mentioned their son Henri, who was about my age. He was a likable fellow and although at this time my ignorance of French and his of English precluded any extensive exchange of ideas, my feminine instinct told me that Henri was not uninterested in me. He was at a period of his life when French families take it for granted that their sons will begin to sow their wild oats. Apparently he had pondered the possibility and decided I was worth cultivating.

In spite of his company, I must have been the loneliest creature in Paris for the first couple of days after Ada Boddington went. "If you ever get homesick," my father had told me the day I sailed from Melbourne, "or have enough of this singing business, let your old Dad know and we'll have you home as quickly as you can say Jack Robinson."

Over and over his words went through my mind during those miserable days when I lost the last tie with my homeland—Ada Boddington. More than once I nearly took Dad at his word.

But the Grodets did not permit me to mope too long. Henri produced a couple of dictionaries and we began to carry on a very restricted conversation: restricted not because we were slow students, but because Henri got hold of a couple of English phrases of the "I-love-you" category and worked them to death.

When I first lived with the Grodets, Henri was employed at a knitting mill. His earnings were not great, but he took me out occasionally and I enjoyed his company. Father's warnings about Frenchmen and their morals were forgotten by this time. I knew they were much like men anywhere, and being with a good-looking, happy fellow like Henri Grodet in exciting, beautiful, romantic Paris, no girl would spend her time remembering parental warnings. Not a girl like me, anyway.

Henri's parents had put their imprimatur on our association and his mother occasionally let fall a phrase suggesting I might make a suitable wife for her son. I of course at that time had other ideas about what I was going to do with my life. The Grodets had been slow to appreciate that I was serious about wanting to sing in opera. They thought that this was a little "queerness" on my part.

After I had been studying with Madame Gilly for a few months, I sang for the family one day and, although they still thought I was flying rather high in aiming at the Paris Opéra, all of them—and particularly Henri—seemed impressed; impressed and surprised.

The quickest way to learn the language of any country, I am sure, is to have a romance with a native of that country. And as my friendship with Henri Grodet ripened, I acquired a working knowledge of French in a very short time.

Once I understood French, I was able to enjoy the mealtime conversation with the Grodets and their other pensioners and finally to enter into the discussions on literature, French history, politics, the latest musical perform-

ances and affairs of the day. Could there possibly be a more pleasurable way of acquiring a higher education?

Living in Paris was enchanting. Coming as I did from the raw new world of Australia, the beauty and antiquity of the French capital, its shrines dedicated to the memory of men whose names had been household words in Europe before Australia was even discovered, fascinated me. Then, too, there was the thrilling realization that I was living in a city where thousands of students from almost every country in the world were seeking knowledge or perfection in some art.

Madame Gilly's demands never permitted too much fun and frolic, but I led a most enjoyable life. I loved my lessons and knew my voice was coming along well. Madame regarded me as being among her star pupils and the musicians who heard me at one or two of her pupils' concerts where she permitted me to sing, predicted I had an operatic career in store.

At the end of my first year with Madame Gilly I auditioned for Philippe Gaubert, leading conductor of the Paris Opéra and a director of the Conservatoire, who was arranging a concert for later in the season at the Salle Gaveau. Gaubert engaged me and I must have sung well because he wanted me there and then to audition for the Opéra. What I remember most vividly about that concert at the Salle Gaveau, however, was the manner in which I obtained the frock in which I sang.

I was staying for part of the summer in a country town near Madame Gilly's farm in the south of France when I was called upon by the Paris representative of an Australian newspaper. We talked about Australia and our experiences in Paris. Then he began to tell me something about

a mistake having been made in his newspaper. He was not very precise about what the mistake was and I was not smart enough to question him.

I was not particularly interested in his newspaper and its errors and would have preferred to have continued talking about Melbourne. But I did prick up my ears when he asked if I were in need of anything: money for fees or a new frock perhaps.

In those days I was particularly sensitive about my clothes. For instance, on my first vacation as a student in Paris, I had gone to Vichy. I stayed at a modest hotel to make my funds go further, but joined the fashionable throng that promenaded outside the Casino every afternoon. There I met a very dashing French officer who lived in Algiers and had come to Vichy for his health. He asked me to go out with him one evening and I accepted—we were to meet about six o'clock.

Naturally I wanted to make a great impression on this young man. I had been reading many of the great love stories of the operatic and classical world, and it dawned on me that the most beloved heroines of these dramas always seemed to float—rather than walk like mere mortals —in long flowing robes. With this in mind, I chose the only long frock I had, one I had made myself. It was of green cretonne with long veils and panels, and I thought it quite filled the bill. I donned it with quiet deliberation and felt I really looked the part of a heroine.

Unfortunately I had not remembered that at six o'clock in the summertime it is still broad daylight. I floated down the avenue of trees, my veils and panels drifting far out behind me. In the distance I could see my handsome officer coming to meet me, but as I approached him, he

disappeared. I was frightfully upset but kept walking, and to my amazement finally found him hiding behind a tree. I asked him what was wrong, and he replied, "What on earth have you got on? Why, you're the laughing stock of the entire avenue. Go home and take off that ridiculous dress. I refuse to be seen with you in that outfit!" Needless to say, that cured me of any desire ever again to enact—at least in real life—the role of the floating, fragile heroine.

As it happened when the reporter came to see me, I had been worrying about how I was to get money to buy myself a dress for the Salle Gaveau concert. So naturally I told my journalist caller that I needed a new formal gown for this affair.

"Well," he said, "you just sign this paper and go to any shop in Paris and spend up to two thousand francs on a dress and we will pay the bill."

He must have thought me a complete goose as I grabbed his pen and wrote my name across the paper he had produced.

I mentioned the journalist's call to my friends and the inquiries they made revealed that this man's paper in Australia had received a cable from its New York bureau about the suicide of the actress Margaret Lawrence. A not-too-alert cable subeditor in Australia had taken the name "Margaret" for "Marjorie" and proclaimed my death to the world.

And for two thousand francs I had, by signing that paper, waived all legal claims against the paper for its blunder. I was angry as a Scot who discovers his pocket has been picked, not so much because I had missed a chance to get some easy money but because I had been taken for a fool.

Still violently annoyed with myself and that Australian journalist, I stalked into one of the smartest shops I knew in Paris and bought a wonderful gown for three thousand francs, not two thousand, and sent the bill to the fellow's office.

It must have been paid because I never heard another word about it.

12. Tough Going

IMBUED WITH hope and confidence, I was striding along towards what Madame Gilly called "the last long mile" of studenthood when a cable from home told me Father had died. I staggered in my stride. Bewildered by grief, for days I could think of nothing but his goodness to me: his one-man fight to bring us up and our careless acceptance as a normal thing of his care and thoughtfulness.

I remembered the way he sang and played with us, those Lawrence family concerts. I tortured myself thinking about the unhappiness I must have caused him by running off to Melbourne. And constantly there recurred to me the picture of him standing miserable and alone on the dock that day I sailed off in the *Jervis Bay* for Europe.

Numbed by sorrow and at the other end of the world from all my kin, I was completely lost. My singing was forgotten. Only the affection and considerateness of the Grodets and Cécile Gilly enabled me to get a grip on myself. The Grodets assured me of their love and told me I was not "alone." They would be my parents; their home would be my home.

And Henri was always at my side, comforting and trying to cheer me, coaxing me to eat and, directly he saw the opportunity, persuading me to go out with him and give Paris a chance to pour her balm upon my sorrow.

Gradually I picked up the threads of my life. Work is

the most effective antidote for sorrow, and Madame Gilly, on whom this realization had been forced by her own experience, kept me as busy as a beaver. She sent me for coaching in the science of acting, insisted on perfection in languages and was always discovering new roles for me to study.

Mary Garden was with her at the time to do some kind of a "refresher" course and I arrived at the studio one day to discover that the famous soprano was on hand to help initiate me into the wonders of Strauss' *Salome*. Mary Garden was always interested in my interpretation of Salome—her own, of course, is still regarded as a paragon by opera people—and she came to the Metropolitan for the general rehearsal before my first performance of the role there.

I first sang Salome in Paris and, like Mary Garden, did the controversial Dance of the Seven Veils myself. I admired Mary Garden tremendously, and I am always flattered when critics compare my Salome with hers and declare that I was as seductive, vocally and histrionically, as she in the part.

My success in *Salome* had an important effect on my life. Before I did the role in Paris I slimmed considerably and subsequently always thought twice about what I ate and drank. I tried never to let an ounce of excess fat grow on my bones. Incidentally, I am told I was the youngest Brünnhilde the Metropolitan has ever had. Surely I was the lightest, too. During my busiest New York seasons I never weighed more than one hundred and thirty-five pounds.

My work, my love for Henri Grodet, visits to the opera and occasional singing engagements had combined to re-

store the joy and adventure of living to me after Father's death. Then I received another breath-taking blow.

Ever since my arrival in Paris a monthly bank draft had arrived from my father which enabled me to pay for lessons, living expenses and other essentials. I relied on its regular appearance as being as certain as anything in life can be. Besides, Father had assured me that if "anything happened" to him he had instructed the family that the money should continue to go forward to me.

I was not very perturbed when the draft did not come on the first usual monthly date after Father's death. I realized how disorganized family affairs would be. But I was scared when nothing came the following month. My allowance had been adequate, no more. I had not been able to save anything out of it.

It was Cyril who broke the news to me that my eldest brother, Lindsay, who had become head of the family, had decided no more money should be sent me. I had been away two years and already had cost Father far too much money, Lindsay had told a family council; if I could not learn to sing in two years, I never would.

Here was an attack from an unexpected quarter. Anyone who tries to achieve anything in life discovers early in the adventure that competitors will engineer setbacks and frustrations for them. Any head that raises itself above the herd must expect to have kicks aimed at it. No matter who does the kicking, these attacks are always hurtful. When the kicker is someone near and dear the hurt is accentuated a hundredfold.

That my brother (and Lindsay, remember, was the brother who was so preoccupied the day I won the aria contest at Geelong that he had forgotten to turn on the

wheat-seeding apparatus) should treat me so shabbily seemed incredible. Seeking a reason, an excuse for his behavior, I could only suppose that now he was head of the family he wanted to show everyone concerned who was boss.

In his letter Cyril urged me to hang on in Paris if I possibly could manage it. He and Eileen would try to change Lindsay's mind. Despite their efforts, only small amounts of money arrived spasmodically. Tearful and shamefaced, I was compelled to tell the Grodets I no longer would be able to pay my rent regularly. They told me not to worry, that they already regarded me as a member of the family and whatever they had they would gladly share with me.

Henri, fiercely angry with my brother, swore he would work hard and make all the money I needed. Earning enough for me to continue my studies became Henri's mission in life. And it was a successful mission. Somehow or other he was always able to produce the francs I needed for lessons, coaching and incidental expenses that mounted as I neared the end of my student days.

I kept a tally on all he loaned me and, happily, I was able to repay him—at least to repay him the money. I shall be eternally indebted to him for his faith in me and his devotion to the cause of my becoming an opera singer. I like to think the impetus I provided to apply himself so energetically to his work was partially responsible for the success he has achieved. I saw Henri when I returned to sing in Paris in 1946. He is now a well-to-do manufacturer and as charming and lovable as ever.

You never know where you will find friends when you need them most. I appreciated what the Grodets did for

me and shall love them for it to my dying day. They had come to believe in my potentialities as a singer as firmly as I did myself. The days when they smiled up their sleeves about my singing at the opera were long since over and they were prepared to battle anyone who did not agree that already I should be inundated with offers to sing all over Europe.

I was particularly touched, too, when a fellow student rallied to my aid. This good Samaritan was Emily Skyring, another Australian who was studying with Madame Gilly. Emily was a very serious student, particularly serious for a girl as well endowed as she was with this world's goods. She had heard of my troubles and with a self-consciousness peculiar to some Australians about to do something generous or gracious, dragged me into a little café after a lesson one day.

"Look here, Lawrence," she said, "I hear you are broke . . . that things are pretty tough with you. You have a better voice than I have and I reckon you'll do something with it. I want you to take this. Spend it on what you need most."

And she shoved a thousand francs into my hand.

I could see Emily wanted me to have the money and I thought she could afford to lend it. As it happened, I had been wondering where on earth I would be able to get the cash to pay for some special coaching I needed. I could no more than thank Emily at the time. But I never shall forget her generosity. Although she insisted I take the thousand francs as a gift, I called on her when I sang in Sydney during my first Australian tour and I was equally insistent on repaying her.

I had not immediately told Madame Gilly about my

financial troubles. Temporarily, by stinting and scraping, I was able to pay for my lessons. But to do so I was compelled to go without many things I sorely needed. My wardrobe, never extensive, was becoming threadbare and my one pair of shoes approaching the end of its tether. During a lesson one day Madame looked down at my shoes and commented on their dilapidated appearance. It had been raining as I walked to the studio and my feet were wet.

"You can't go round Paris in the winter with shoes like that," she snapped. "You'll get your death of cold."

There was no holding back then. I had to tell her I was broke and was kept going only through the Grodets' charity.

"Silly girl," she exclaimed when she heard my tale of woe. "Obviously you cannot pay for lessons any more. But come just the same. You can pay me after you've arrived."

To hear Cécile Gilly talk about my "arriving" as though it were a foregone conclusion made my poverty almost enjoyable. For quite a while I had been feeling as a boxer must as the date for a big fight draws near. I wanted "to go." I knew I was almost ready for my debut and I itched to try my wings. My impatience was aggravated by the fact that Rita Miller, the Australian coloratura who had been with Madame Gilly only a little longer than I, had already made a successful opera debut and was receiving good provincial engagements.

Madame Gilly never permitted her students to sing publicly while they were only half-baked. Neither did she keep them caged too long after they had learned to sing.

"It is all very well," she would say, "to give a good performance of an aria in your teacher's studio. There the teacher is a prop for you. You are singing in a congenial atmosphere. That is no test for a singer. But get out on your own somewhere. Stand on your own feet and sing well for people who have to be convinced that you can sing. That is the true test."

I already had submitted myself to that test several times before the day I told Madame Gilly about my financial troubles. I knew twelve operatic roles and I had given many auditions. These had brought a few engagements, mostly at small concerts that earned me only a few francs. But every time I sang in public, every time I auditioned, I learned something useful.

I missed an engagement to sing *Tosca* with a small company because the entrepreneur said I was too good and would make the rest of the cast sound second-rate! And on another occasion I made the stupid mistake of telling a manager I did not know a certain role.

"Never admit you do not know anything," Madame Gilly said when I told her. "Say yes, yes, yes to everything you are asked. Whatever the role is *you* can learn it without much delay."

The advice was timely. A few days later Madame Gilly greeted me upon my arrival at the studio by saying, "I have made an appointment for you to see Raoul Gunsbourg, the director of the Monte Carlo Opéra. I have told him about you and he wants to hear you sing. The audition will be at his home in the Quartier Latin."

I knew something of Monsieur Gunsbourg. Paris regarded him as one of its foremost vocal authorities, but it was not his knowledge of singers and singing that had

created so many legends about him. It was, rather, the peculiarity of his manners and style of living.

His behavior at table was extraordinary. It was his habit to reach with fork or fingers into the plates of nearby guests to steal any tidbits that took his fancy. Nor was this a one-way transaction either because, as I know from personal experience, he would also take food from his own plate and put it on those of his guests.

"Ma petite chérie, goutez-moi cela!" he used to say to me as, without regard to what I was eating or what he himself had on his plate, he dumped some morsel among my food.

Gunsbourg imagined himself a great lover and to ladies whose favors he hoped to receive, he invariably presented "an antique pearl necklace." I know at least a dozen people, including myself, Mimi Grodet and a Japanese prima donna, to whom he has made this gift. Antique pearl necklace, my eye! He must have had them mass-produced somewhere in Birmingham!

Nevertheless, what with the stories I had heard about him and the high artistic standing I knew his Monte Carlo season enjoyed, I was very thrilled at the prospect of singing for Gunsbourg. But I was not brave enough to venture to his home alone and insisted Mimi Grodet accompany me. Madame Gilly, adhering to her theory about the importance of students learning to do without a prop, always refused to go with us to auditions.

As Mimi and I arrived at Gunsbourg's home in the rue de Vaugirard, we saw another figure standing in the porch waiting to be admitted. As we got close we were as thrilled as a couple of bobby-soxers seeing Sinatra for the first time to discover that it was the basso Marcel Journet, one of the most distinguished Wotans of all time. He, too, was

calling on Gunsbourg. We were taken to Gunsbourg's studio while Journet was ushered off to another part of the house.

Despite the stories I had heard, I was not fully prepared for Gunsbourg's startling appearance. I experienced a most queer feeling as I looked at the squat little man with the huge black brow. I was somewhat calmed when I saw that his faithful maestro, Louis Narici, was on hand to play for me. Narici had been an associate of some of the very-greats and I had heard it said that he "ghosted" parts of the opera *Ivan le Terrible,* which bears Gunsbourg's name.

I had sung only about a dozen bars of "Divinités du Styx," which had ousted "O Don Fatale" as my favorite showpiece, when Gunsbourg stopped me.

"Enough, enough," he said. "Come into my office."

We walked into a room off the studio and he sat down at a desk.

"Can you sing the *Tétralogie?*" he asked.

The *Tétralogie*—what in the name of heaven could that be? I did not know. But, remembering Madame Gilly's advice and her assurance that I could learn any role quickly, I nodded and said, "Yes, yes."

"And *Tosca?*"

"Yes, yes," this time truthfully.

"*Butterfly?*"

"Yes, yes," again.

"What about Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser?*"

"Yes, yes."

"Good. Very soon, I hope, you will make your debut with me at Monte Carlo as Elisabeth."

He went on in his purring voice. He would send a contract to me and other details would be taken care of.

Naturally I was happy at last to be making my debut, but, singer-like, disappointed because the old fellow had said nothing at all about my voice.

We went back into the studio where Mimi was waiting. Journet, too, had come in and was talking to Narici. Gunsbourg greeted the basso and then turning to me said, "What else are you going to sing for me?"

I began with some *Butterfly,* then turned to *Tosca.* After I sang the "Vissi d'arte" Journet came to the piano and, flicking back the pages of the *Tosca* score, suggested we sing the Scarpia-Tosca duets which take place earlier in the second act.

Never had I enjoyed singing so much. Journet's luscious voice rolled out, challenging me to match his tones. Narici did incredible things with the piano and old Gunsbourg, who was a genuine music lover, smiled his happiness. As for Mimi, she sat on the edge of her chair incredulous that I, her friend, was singing with the fabulous Journet.

Did any singer ever have such an audition? Journet and Gunsbourg were most gracious when we left, the impresario inquiring of Mimi about her family, whom he knew, and complimenting her on her beauty. We went directly to Madame Gilly, who was as delighted as we were at the news we brought.

"I knew it, I knew it," she kept saying.

"Oh, Madame," I said as an afterthought, "do you know the opera *Tétralogie?* I told Gunsbourg I knew it."

"The *Tétralogie,*" she shouted, laughing. "Do you realize, young woman, you told the man you knew the whole of Wagner's *Ring?* Here we call it the *Tétralogie.* You are going to be quite busy before you go to Monte Carlo."

Quite busy . . . that was putting it mildly!

13. Monte Carlo Gamble

APPROPRIATELY there was a gambling aspect to my going to Monte Carlo. And it had nothing to do with the fabled Casino. The parts of my contract that on a first reading concerned me most were those calling for a three-months' engagement and a fee of five thousand francs. Subsequent more sober examination of the document, however, disclosed that Gunsbourg had inserted a clause—and a similar provision was in every other new singer's contract—that enabled him to drop me from the company if he did not like my performance at the general rehearsal.

This was a serious business for anyone as light on cash as I was. Gambling on the chances of my general rehearsal coming up to Gunsbourg's standard, I had to put up as a stake the cost of tickets for Mimi Grodet (her parents insisted she go with me) and myself from Paris to Monte Carlo, plus our living expenses there for several days! No insubstantial sum for me.

The opera at Monte Carlo, at least before the war, was always of a high standard. Gunsbourg paid well and artists were glad to get to the Mediterranean for the brilliant season. My eyes swam when I first saw my name on a poster outside the opera house. The words "Marjorie Lawrence" were much longer than the names of any other singer and seemed to stretch right across the billboard. I looked down the cast listed for my debut and could not

help nudging Mimi in the ribs to draw her attention to the famous people who were to sing with me. I was particularly glad my Tannhäuser was to be Georges Thill, whose glorious voice was then at its God-given best and who, I think, is one of the most exciting Tannhäusers, vocally, I have heard.

Thill was very cordial at the general rehearsal which went off well, even the orchestra putting down its instruments to applaud at the end of my first aria. Vocally I felt I was very good, but I was shocked to discover what a world of difference there is between going through the dramatics of a role with a coach and trying to put into effect at a performance the things you hope you have learned.

My acting was nowhere near as good as my singing. There was so much to think about, so much to watch for, that I was unable to do all I had hoped histrionically with the Elisabeth role. But Gunsbourg was satisfied. I had won my gamble. For the time being that was all that mattered.

Georges Thill, I know now, is not one of the most gifted actors ever to have scaled the operatic heights, but at the Monte Carlo general rehearsal I was too occupied with myself to form any opinion of his acting. I was immensely flattered when he came to my dressing room after the rehearsal and offered to help me remove some of the "stiffness" from *my* acting.

"Mademoiselle, you have a magnificent voice," he declared, "but your acting . . . you must let me help you. Come to my hotel tomorrow afternoon and we will see what we can do. Come alone." He had noted Mimi's hovering presence. "I can teach better if the pupil is alone."

I overwhelmed him with thanks. Such an offer coming from so celebrated a tenor, the darling of the Paris Opéra, was enough to flutter the heart of any operatic debutante—even had the tenor not been so dashing a glamor boy as Georges Thill.

I went to see him at his hotel next day and learned quite a lot—but not about acting!

The day of the Tannhäuser performance I feared my nonco-operation in his drawing room might cause Thill to be nonco-operative in the opera. I had heard stories of tenors' skill in sabotaging other singers, and worried myself sick. And gulping down a porto flip just before I went on did not repair my physical or mental discomfort.

An ancient opera house attendant arrived at my dressing room with the flip, a concoction of egg and wine, and urged me to drink it because it would give me strength. Give me strength! All it gave me was a headache and a dry throat. Since then I have never sipped anything but cool water on days when I sing.

But I need not have worried about Thill. Although he gave a splendid personal performance and never missed a trick in his own role, he made it evident from my first entry that it was my night and did everything he could to help me. Once or twice I needed help, too. Sweeping onto the stage for my entrance I stumbled on a piece of wood some careless stagehand had left in my path. I might have fallen had Thill not been watchful and grabbed me.

I recovered in time to begin the famous greeting, "Salut à toi, noble demeure," ("Dich Theure Halle") and was relieved to discover my voice was in fine fettle—despite the porto flip and the stumble. I did not have any uncomfortable moments until after the end of the act. Then, in

taking my bows too energetically, my crown toppled forward, perching precariously on the tip of my nose until I pushed it back on my head.

As I said earlier, a singer learns something every time she sings. I learned two things at my debut: stage crowns do not stay put unless they are pinned to your wig; and that the art of make-up had been a badly neglected part of my operatic education. I made myself up and I must have looked ghastly, as though I had dipped my face in a flour bin.

"*Qu'est-ce-que-c'est?* You look like a cloon!" screamed Gunsbourg as he burst into my dressing room after the second act.

Picking up the rabbit's foot from my dressing table, he rubbed it in the rouge jar and began smearing my face. By the time he was through I did look like a "cloon."

Regardless of how I looked, the people liked my singing. Every chance they had to applaud me they accepted, and at the end of the opera I was given a wonderful ovation. Musically I was completely satisfied. I had sung well and hoped I had given a thoroughly competent performance.

I sat in my dressing room afterwards listening to the cacophony of stage sounds that follows the end of any show. I felt I had accomplished something tremendous, but there was an elusive sour taste in the wine of my success. The applause had delighted my heart but now it was over. There should be something more.

One or two of the singers put their heads in and congratulated me. Gunsbourg made the brief little speech I imagine he always delivers on such occasions. Mimi Grodet was with me. She, too, felt something was missing. We had come to the opera in long, frilly evening gowns bought

especially for the occasion, believing someone would be sure to want to take us out to celebrate.

We waited, but no bid came for our company. The theater noises died away and we were about to leave when a stagehand came in with a note that cheered me more than if a hundred stage door Freddies had been competing for my favors.

My dear, the note began, *you will be one of the greatest.*

It was signed: *Clara Butt.*

I passed the message to Mimi, remembering how I had sat out in the paddocks at home striving to imitate Dame Clara's opulent tones in "O Don Fatale," "Land of Hope and Glory," and other songs after having played her recordings of them over and over again.

With no prospect of further excitement, Mimi and I left the theater and walked back through Monte Carlo's gay streets to our mean little hotel. We rose late next morning still feeling that despite my reception, Gunsbourg's congratulations and Clara Butt's note, the debut had not been all we had hoped for.

The truth was that the occasion had been so terribly important to us that if God had put ten new stars in the sky to mark it we would not have thought He was overdoing things.

After breakfast we left the hotel to walk in the sunshine. Until we saw a newspaper kiosk outside the park in which we had intended to sit, neither of us had thought of getting a paper and reading what the critics had said about the opera. In time, like all other musicians and actors I know, I came to grope for the papers even before I was properly awake on mornings after important engagements.

I saw Mimi buy a bundle of papers, put all except one

under her arm. This she opened and began to read as she walked back towards me.

"Look, Marjorie, look," she yelled and came on running, waving the paper about her head.

I took the paper from her. Strung across the critic's review of *Tannhäuser* was a bold heading proclaiming my debut as being as sensational as those of Chaliapin and Caruso.

We read all the notices. All were lyrical. The writers had used up so much space praising the quality of my voice, my dramatic sense, my musicianship and predicting a sensational career for me that apparently they had none left to refer to my stumbling onto the stage or my wayward crown.

Failing extra stars in the sky, this would do!

14. On the Way

WITH A contract from Gunsbourg to sing at Monte Carlo again the next season, more francs in my purse than I had ever owned at any one time previously, and wearing a white rabbit fur coat as an insignia of my triumph, I went back to Paris. The Grodets welcomed me as though I had been away for years and hastened to show me my room, which they had had hung with new blue wallpaper during my absence.

Madame Gilly joined in the welcome. She greeted me affectionately and was delighted that the debut had gone so well.

"Your success is payment enough," she said when I sought to pay my outstanding fees.

But she would not let me rest on my oars, and I had no mind to. Now I had begun my career, she was determined to keep me moving. Almost immediately she wrote to Jacques Rouché, director-general of the Paris Opéra, requesting an audition. She felt I had done well enough at Monte Carlo to go directly to the Opéra without spending any time in the provinces; an opinion which, I believe, was supported by conversations she had with Gunsbourg.

A fortnight later came the reply from Rouché: I would be granted an audition two days ahead. And what a two days they were! An Opéra audition called for a new frock

and my Monte Carlo fees did not permit me to walk into a shop and buy a dress. I still had to make my own.

Within an hour of Madame Gilly's telling me I was to audition at the Opéra I was searching through the bargain "ends" of material at Dreyfus's well-known market at the foot of Sacré Coeur, hoping to find something that could be whipped into a suitable frock for the occasion. I found it: a piece of lavender georgette.

There was a discussion about the pattern we should use for the dress. Friends of Mimi as well as her mother were called into the council. Between us we decided that the dress should be of the current style with a bias skirt. It was not a happy decision. At noon on the day of the audition (I was to present myself at the opera house two hours later) I was standing on the Grodet kitchen table while Mimi and the others tried to discover why that wretched skirt would not hang right.

We never did get the thing to our satisfaction, but with harmonizing accessories—shoes, bag and the rest, borrowed from half a dozen friendly wardrobes—I think I looked reasonably well turned out, even for Paris, when Madame Gilly's friend, Gustave Bret, leading critic for *L'Intransigeant* and a noted Bach conductor with whom I had sung several times, arrived to escort me to the opera house.

Votive candles burned all that day before the high altar of the church near the Grodet house. Some of the family went to early morning Mass and prayed for me, leaving candles burning afterwards. During the day the other Grodets paid visits to the church, praying for my success and leaving more candles that would be aflame while I was singing.

"Regulars" at the Paris Opéra, singers and others, take

a family interest in the place. To them it is more than an institution that provides their livelihood: it is their life. Even when they are not obliged to be on hand for rehearsals or coaching, numbers of singers are invariably in the vicinity of the theater, interested in what goes on.

On audition days even artists right at the top of the list try to be present to hear the new singers. The stalls were nearly full when I arrived with Gustave Bret for my audition. I recognized the tenor José de Trévi sitting in a seat on the aisle and not far from him was that very fine basso, André Pernet.

Several others were being auditioned and as I awaited my turn I was reminded of my ordeal at the Geelong aria contest. These other singers all seemed so very good, I wondered what chance I would have of being engaged if they were not.

Sensibly, because I knew it so well and not even the worst case of "nerves" was likely to upset my singing of it, I had chosen to offer "Divinités du Styx." I do not know if Rouché had been told of my weakness for the Gluck aria and the frequency with which I performed it, but after I had sung it through, he called from the back of the opera house: "Do you know anything else?"

Did I know anything else? I certainly did and something I hoped Rouché's ears were anxious to hear. Madame Gilly's "spies" had reported that there was no one at the Opéra able to sing the Ortrud music in *Lohengrin* as the directors wanted it sung: those whose voices were sufficiently "dark" for the role could not sing its top notes.

"I would like to sing Ortrud's Invocation from the second act of *Lohengrin*," I replied to Rouché, my speaking

voice sounding very small and lonely in the huge auditorium.

"We would be very interested to hear *that*," he responded.

"*O dieux de haine*," I began, and the A sharp on the first syllable of "haine" was just right . . . and, so I thought, was the rest of the excerpt.

There was a gratifyingly warm round of applause from the artists listening. Rouché waited for it to stop and then dismissed me with a curt "*Merci, mademoiselle.*"

I do not know how I had expected Rouché to react. I knew I had done well, though, and that cold "*Merci, mademoiselle*" was a blow. It was a very dejected Marjorie Lawrence who went home to the Grodets. She remained dejected until next morning. Then her unhappiness went off like flimsy clouds before a breeze when the postman arrived with a summons to report to Rouché.

I knew what this meant. I was in! Rouché and his associates who had heard me thought, at least, that I was worth polishing. They would turn me over to their coaches and directly I was ready I would be given a contract to sing.

Jacques Rouché is no longer at the Opéra. They tell me in Paris he was too friendly with the Nazis during the occupation. His politics may have been bad. I do not know. But his devotion to the Opéra was boundless. He derived a well-proportioned income from the Coty perfume firm and poured a million or so francs into the Opéra's coffers every year.

Rouché was the perfect director-general and under him the Paris Opéra made tremendous artistic progress. He not only rallied fine talent round him and kept it, but dis-



Invincible Press

Homecoming, 1939, greeted by Winchelsea's mounted cavalry



Invincible Press

On horseback, Australia, 1939

covered and fostered new talent. Because he knew as much about opera as any man, he was able to make his own judgments about artists and repertoires. He never haggled over money and did not compel artists to sell their talents like so many vegetables. Under Rouché's jurisdiction, merit and consistently good performances always won immediate recognition, more money and better roles.

Taking the faithful Mimi for support, I at once responded to the summons to report to Rouché. He was a very different person from the one I had encountered the previous afternoon. He congratulated me on my audition and it was extremely gratifying to hear this operatic epicure finding so many praiseworthy things about my work.

"We are going to engage you," I heard him say. "We must begin work right away. I will send you a contract in a few days."

"Yes. Thank you very much," was all I could manage to say for myself before tottering from the room into Mimi's reassuring arms.

That same week I began working with Maurice Faure, now at the New York Metropolitan but then the leading coach in Paris, and to rehearse with the great stars of the opera house in a number of roles: Brünnhilde in *Walküre,* Ortrud in *Lohengrin,* the title role in *Aïda,* Valentine in *Les Huguenots,* and others.

Any singer will appreciate what a thrill it was for me even to be rehearsing in the theater that had been my shrine for so long. But despite the thrills, I was not happy. The contract Rouché had promised did not materialize. I tried to be patient, but this was impossible when people told me that Germaine Lubin, who had been the com-

pany's principal dramatic soprano for some time, was exerting influence to prevent my contract being completed.

The contract's nonarrival became a topic of conversation among the habitués of the opera house with the result that one of them, an impresario named Fichefet, made a suggestion that gave another lift to my career.

"Why don't you get in touch with the people at Lille?" Fichefet asked. "I understand they are preparing for a season and their dramatic soprano has not shown up yet."

At Fichefet's prompting I got Henri Grodet to phone the Lille Opéra and offer my services for rehearsals, suggesting that my work be regarded as an audition.

Within a few hours Mimi and I were on the train to Lille.

On arrival we went directly to the opera house where a dress rehearsal of *La Valkyrie* was about to begin. Was I prepared to do the role of Brünnhilde there and then, the director wanted to know.

Was I? I dived into a dressing room and began to put on the costume I found there. Fatigue caused by the train journey left me as I dressed and listened to other members of the company singing the first act.

Despite my hasty costuming I must have looked impressive because when Paul Cabanel, who was singing Wotan, saw me he exclaimed: "At last Wotan has a daughter who looks as though she were sprung from the gods."

That little speech was the opening play in my romantic friendship with the basso—a not unimportant phase in my development as a singer and a woman!

15. Provincial Opera

FRENCH CRITICS have written many laudatory things about performances Paul Cabanel and I have given of *La Valkyrie* (*Die Walküre*) at the Paris Opéra, but our appearance together in this opera that I remember most vividly was that at the general rehearsal the morning I arrived in Lille. Cabanel took me in his arms when we came off the stage at the end of the second act, praised my singing and declared I had captured his heart. And I really believed I had.

I had not then become accustomed to the pulse-quickening passionate outbursts of which most Frenchmen are capable even on the slightest provocation. It never would have occurred to me—then—that any man could speak to a woman as Cabanel spoke to me that morning unless he were impelled by a surging emotion. But, alack and alas, as I moved among French opera folk I discovered that these wild declarations of devotion and desire should not be taken overseriously—they were as natural to them as drinking red wine.

But at Lille I was very young and unsuspecting. As my head lay against Cabanel's mighty chest and he protested his undying passion for me, I felt that all my romantic dreams had come true. I finished the opera in a state of wild ecstasy, forgetting I was pinch-hitting for another

singer, forgetting I was only a very ambitious student making a desperate try to barnstorm her way into opera.

I sat in the dressing room after the last act striving to get back to earth. I was still Brünnhilde lying on her rock surrounded by Wotan's protective magic flame. I was shocked back to reality by the entrance of the opera director bemoaning that he had not heard me before he engaged Georgette Caro, the soprano whose late arrival had caused me to come to Lille.

"Mademoiselle," he almost implored me, "will you stay? We can give you five appearances: two Aïdas, three Brünnhildes."

Would I stay?

The director lamented that Georgette Caro already had been billed to sing Brünnhilde in the opening performance of *La Valkyrie*, but he promised she would sing Sieglinde to my Brünnhilde at the two other performances the company would give of the opera.

As the director left, Cabanel came in with congratulations on my engagement and more words of endearment. He told me he would be singing in *Aïda* with me, too.

I was to sing with more distinguished companies, but those weeks at Lille were a time of unforgettable joy for me. The performances gave me a chance to try out before an audience the things I had learned at the Paris Opéra, and they came off well. I felt that at last I had come into my own. And of course there was Cabanel!

To Mimi Grodet's consternation, the basso moved into our hotel and spent quite a deal of his time when we were not singing together standing in the passageway outside our bedroom door murmuring messages of his love to me. It was all very thrilling, but must have been upsetting for a

well-brought-up girl like Mimi. Perpetually semi-intoxicated with excitement as I was, it did not seem abnormal to me that Cabanel behaved as he did. It was wonderful . . . wonderful!

To say I lived the roles I sang at Lille is no exaggeration. When I sang of my love to Radames in *Aïda* I really thought of my love for Amonasro—Cabanel—and in the third act of that opera, in the "O Patria Mia" aria, I thought of Australia and would be in tears when the act ended. Cabanel was always in the wings waiting to embrace and comfort me as I came off.

Thanks to Madame Gilly's schooling, my highly emotional condition did not adversely affect my singing. My technique was well-established. Not fifty Cabanels could have upset it. Actually the excitement improved my acting. Thank God, I did not overdo things and emote too thickly! In any case, the people liked me and the season was a success.

Many of my colleagues at the Paris Opéra steered clear of accepting engagements in the provinces directly their finances permitted. In general, French provincial audiences are notoriously hard to please. Names mean little to them and if a singer ventures into provincial theaters she cannot hope to get by merely on her reputation: she must live up to that reputation and her billing. People who make up provincial audiences know every note of the usual operatic repertoires and every bit of traditional stage business that goes with them. These operas are part of the people's lives and woe betide an artist who plays fast and loose with them.

No one, certainly not a singer still striving to get to the top, makes much money singing in the provinces. The

profit from my first Lille season (two Aïdas, three Brünnhildes) was about two dollars. And after a subsequent season at Nantes for which I learned the role of Brunehild in Reyer's *Sigurd* in eight days, I had a little over six dollars in my purse after meeting essential expenses.

And of course production facilities in provincial theaters are not always adequate and singers must be prepared to run a certain amount of physical risk from makeshift paraphernalia used in some places. I recall, not without anguish, a performance of *Walküre* at Nice for which a mobile steam engine parked outside the theater provided the "magic fire" for the last act. Something or other went wrong with the mechanism with the result that when I lay on Brünnhilde's rock as the beautiful "sleep" motif welled up from the orchestra in the last act, I felt more like a hamburger than a daughter of the gods. Escaping steam had rendered the "rock" as hot as a gridiron and many days were to pass before I could sit with any degree of comfort!

But despite the discomforts and the small fees, the seasons I played in the French provinces enabled me to make invaluable artistic progress. I began to understand what Madame Gilly had meant by telling us to learn to stand on our own artistic feet and I appreciated, too, what an excellent "finishing school" the provincial theaters provide for young singers. As a matter of fact, I do not think American opera will make any real headway until this country, too, has built up a system of smaller opera houses (something in the nature of the "farm clubs" the major baseball teams operate) such as one finds in France, Italy and Germany.

The opera season at the New York City Center, established in comparatively recent years by that stalwart

battler for many causes, including the cause of good music, the late Fiorello La Guardia, his colleague Newbold Morris and their progressive and artistic musical director Laszlo Halasz, is the type of thing I have in mind. When similar theaters are functioning in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and three or four other major American cities, opera here will be on the march.

The Metropolitan is all very well in its own way and tries (again in its own way) to develop American talent. But is the Metropolitan's way the most beneficial to operatic development? Small European opera houses not only provide places where young singers can cut their artistic teeth but also, as I have said, they build up discerning audiences: audiences that go to opera because they understand it, love it, enjoy it.

Such audiences, audiences that refuse to be bedazzled by star-spangled casts or to be fobbed off with the second-rate, foster good opera. People who go to opera because they imagine their attendance proclaims their social and economic progress to their friends—well, they get the opera they deserve. Not that they know the difference, but it is rather hard on people of honesty and discernment, whether performers or listeners, who must suffer the consequences of their snobbishness and gullibility.

16. It Never Rains But . . .

I SUFFERED a depressing letdown when I came back to Paris from Lille to find that not only had no contract arrived for me from the Paris Opéra, but neither had any more convocations to rehearse come to hand. Three months had passed since my audition. I had only half believed people who told me Germaine Lubin was conspiring to prevent my being engaged. But as I thought things over and recalled my interview with Rouché and how definite he had been about wanting me to sing, I was inclined to think there was something sinister about his silence.

Madame Gilly must have had an idea of what we were up against because she did not suggest another visit to Rouché. She took it for granted that, for the time being at least, the Paris Opéra's doors were shut to me and she advised me to audition at the Opéra-Comique.

The Paris Opéra was my goal and had been since my first day in Paris. But I had been to the Opéra-Comique and knew that although its repertoire did not include many of the operas I wished to sing, it did maintain a very high standard. If I were not to sing at the Paris Opéra, then the Comique was the next best place for me. Besides, I wanted to sing. I knew I could and I wanted people to hear me.

And so within a few days I was one of a contingent of singers hopefully presenting themselves for a hearing at

the Comique. Having auditioned and rehearsed at the Paris Opéra I felt a little superior: a little superior and a little unhappy because, excellent theater though it is, the Opéra-Comique is *not* the Paris Opéra. And I was terribly conscious of the fact. I could not help contrasting the way in which the two theaters conducted auditions. At the Paris Opéra proceedings were all so decorous and carried off in the grand manner. But there was nothing grand about my Comique audition which was a very rough-and-tumble affair.

While singer after singer, their artistic futures hanging in the balance, went onto the stage and sang, a gang of carpenters and other workmen was putting up a set of scenery. They persisted in a most unmusical clatter of hammering and conversation. Their rat-tatting and chatter were in full blast as I began Margared's aria from Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys*. I was so angry I was able to do little more than sing the notes, abandoning all hope that in such circumstances I could sing well enough to win an engagement.

I was about halfway through when the din stopped—stopped as abruptly as a great symphony orchestra stops its tuning-up noises when the conductor hisses for quiet before beginning a concert. I felt as though I had come from the glaring sun into a cool and shady place. The quiet was such a relief, so soothing, it made me wonderfully happy. Immediately I entered into the spirit of my aria and I could not have sung the latter part of it better than I did.

"Good, good," shouted Monsieur Gheusi, director of the Comique, when it was over. "Now something else. How about 'Vissi d'Arte'?"

I sang the *Tosca* aria, again in perfect quiet. I was told later that the indifference of Opéra-Comique workmen to people giving auditions was notorious. Their keeping quiet while I sang probably was one of the greatest compliments I ever would receive.

I was still standing in the middle of the stage after having sung "Vissi d'Arte," when Gheusi bellowed, "Why aren't you at the Opéra?"

Not totally truthfully, I replied, "I am sure I do not know, Monsieur."

"Well, come to my office. Come on, come now." And leaving the audition, he marched out of the theater with me dashing after him.

"Are you free? Are you open for engagement?" he asked before I had a chance to sit down.

"Yes," I replied, "I am."

"*Bien.* I engage you. You know Santuzza in *Cavalleria?*"

I nodded.

"You make your debut here in one week in that role. I will send the contract."

I was too bewildered to notice two of Gheusi's assistants who had come into his office on our heels, but I was to recall their presence with some misgiving.

Now that I was to appear at the Comique I cast from my mind all thoughts of its shortcomings and pondered only upon its glories: the splendid performances it gave of its own special repertoire, the talented singers on its roster, the exalted place it occupied in operatic history. I knew there were hundreds of young artists in Paris who would count themselves highly honored had they been asked to appear at the Comique. Above all, I knew that had it not been for my nagging desire to sing at the Paris

Opéra I would have been in a seventh heaven of delight over my engagement.

Thus, as I walked away from the Comique, what had happened to me that afternoon gradually moved into proper perspective. I realized that at last I was to sing opera in Paris. I was wildly excited by the realization. So much so, I was compelled to share the news immediately with some friend. I simply could not wait until I got home to the Grodets.

My way took me along the rue Grange-Batelière, past the home of Pierre Chereau, then and now stage director at the Paris Opéra, and his fascinating American wife, Abby Richardson, with whom I had studied the stagecraft of many roles. I must explain that Pierre Chereau was a much more important person at the Paris Opéra than his title of "stage director" might imply to some people. He was, and is, a man of almost unbounded authority in deciding how each and every opera in the repertoire shall be presented. The directors of the Opéra over the years, appreciating his phenomenal knowledge of all facets of opera production, have been happy to give his judgment full sway.

From my earliest days at the Opéra, Pierre Chereau and his wife took a most flattering interest in my work and it was for that reason and my belief that they would be delighted at my news that I decided to call on them on my way home from the Comique to tell them about the audition.

Monsieur Chereau, wise in the ways of opera houses, listened as I babbled my story, but his face showed that what I told him did not make him happy.

"*Mon enfant,*" he said, putting up his hand to silence

me, "I advise . . . I urge you . . . do not sign a contract with the Comique until you see Monsieur Rouché again."

"Do you think Monsieur Rouché wants to see me again?" I asked.

"I am fairly sure he does."

That was all there was to our conversation, but I left the Chereaus bewildered and upset, and plodded on my way at a much slower, sadder gait.

The good Grodets strove to be enthusiastic about the Comique and to make supper that night a celebration to mark my "success." But Monsieur Chereau's sobering comment, his hint that there was still a chance of my being engaged for the Paris Opéra, tended to make the Comique seem like very small potatoes.

Monsieur Chereau let no grass grow under his feet. Early the following morning I received one of those French "pneumatique" special delivery letters from Rouché's secretary saying that the director-general would be pleased to see me that afternoon.

"Mimi, Mimi," I shouted when I read it, sounding like the tenor at the end of *Bohême*, "put on your pretty dress again. We are making another call on Monsieur Rouché."

There was the usual collection of singers, journalists, opera patrons, technicians and others waiting in the anteroom of Rouché's office when Mimi and I arrived. Julien, Rouché's six-foot tall major-domo who ruled the roost outside his master's office with a rod of iron, greeted us with unwonted warmth and formality.

Eyebrows were raised and tongues went a-clacking as Julien ushered me directly in to Rouché as though already I were one of his stars. Only those acquainted with the practice which characterized Rouché's rule of the

Opéra could appreciate what Julien's behavior implied. Those tired-limbed sitters outside the great man's door knew from experience that I was being particularly honored.

Sitting behind his massive desk, elegantly dressed and, as always, plucking his beard, Rouché looked precisely what he was—the opera director par excellence. I had wondered how our interview would begin. Would he expect me to say anything about the nonarrival of my contract? Would it be wise for me even to broach that subject? Should I tell him the tales I had heard about Lubin?

I need not have worried. Rouché took complete control of the situation—a not very difficult feat because in those days I was practically speechless in his presence, despite many rehearsals with Mimi of what I should say to him and how I should say it.

"What's this I'm told about your having been over to the Comique?" he asked quizzically, like a parent who discovers a favorite child in a minor prank.

"Well, *mon cher maître* . . . " I began, and dried up completely.

"We cannot have that, can we? You couldn't sing there. It's impossible . . . unthinkable," he said, completely ignoring my attempt to speak.

He slid open a drawer in his desk, took out a document and passed it to me.

"If you sign this I don't think we will have to worry about the Comique . . . will we?" I heard him say as, mechanically, I took into my fingers the pen he offered.

I glanced at the document and saw enough to know it was what I thought—a contract to sing at the Paris Opéra. It did not occur to me even to see what fee I was to receive

or how many performances I was to give. I signed at the places Rouché indicated, grabbed my copy of the contract, shook Rouché's hand and rushed from his office.

By this time the Grodets, especially Mimi, had become inured to my doing things that struck them as being unusual. And as I came out of Rouché's office waving my contract about my head, I could see Mimi was preparing herself for another shock.

"*Q'est-ce que tu as fait maintenant?*" she asked. ("What have you done now?")

Her emphasis on the word "now" was eloquent!

I told her.

"But what about the Opéra-Comique? Don't you realize you gave your word to sing there next week?"

"Yes, I realize it. But I will have to get out of that. What's the matter with you, Mimi? Aren't you happy? I am going to sing here . . . here at the Paris Opéra."

I was still waving my contract, striving to make Mimi feel as elated as I.

Up the hill along the rue des Martyrs we dashed, arguing and shouting. I wonder what the fruit and vegetable dealers standing in their stalls along the way must have thought of us! I did not care what anyone thought that afternoon. I was so engrossed with my argument with Mimi I did not even notice the steep incline of the rue des Martyrs which always made the walk between the Grodet home and the Opéra a tiring expedition.

"Yes, I know it's wonderful. I'm as happy as you are that Rouché wants you to sing for him," said Mimi, "but the Opéra-Comique . . . you'll get yourself into trouble."

"Ah, I'll fix that. Come on. Let's get home and tell the others. Don't worry any more."

But next morning when a convocation and contract from the Opéra-Comique was delivered to me, it was I who was worrying.

Carefully I composed a letter to the Comique, regretting my inability to accept the contract. With a prayer on my lips I posted it off and hoped I would hear no more about it. That was one of my prayers that was not heard.

By return mail I received a heavily sealed letter the very sight of which nearly frightened me to death. Tersely it reminded me that I had given a binding verbal undertaking before witnesses (I remembered those other people in Gheusi's office) to sing at the Opéra-Comique. If I did not fulfill that undertaking a court writ would be taken out against me.

In a state bordering on panic I ran to Pierre Chereau's house and showed him the Comique's letter. He was so little disturbed that I suspect he had imagined there would be some trouble with the Comique, even when he went to Rouché to tell him I was to sing there.

"Calm yourself, *mon enfant,*" he said. "Take that letter to Monsieur Rouché. I should think his attorneys will be able to take care of it for you."

I was about to leave when Monsieur Chereau called me back.

"And by the way," he said, "while you are about it you might mention to Monsieur Rouché that you have contracted to sing for Gunsbourg at Monte Carlo next season."

I had forgotten that one altogether!

Again I saw Rouché. I handed over to him, with an ill-concealed sigh of relief, the Comique ultimatum and my contract with Gunsbourg. Only a few months before, the latter had been my most treasured possession. Now I was

thankful to be rid of it. Rouché promised to deal with both matters and he must have done so effectively. I heard no more about them.

Only as the days slipped by and I knew without having been told specifically that Rouché had extricated me from my contractual mess, did the fact strike me that two of the world's most renowned opera houses—the Paris Opéra and the Comique—had been vying for my services.

I had been away from Australia only three years and, even if my brother Lindsay did consider my progress slow, I thought I had done pretty well.



Invincible Press

My husband and I at the University of Minnesota Hospital, 1941



Sister Kenny and I

17. Mission Accomplished

I MADE MY Paris Opéra debut on the night of February 25, 1933, as Ortrud in *Lohengrin.* The role of the rascally sorceress is not an ideal debut medium. I was far too young to be a convincing Ortrud histrionically, despite the efforts of the opera's make-up squad.

Friends who were in the audience confessed that when the curtain rose and they saw me, so small and obviously youthful, sitting diffidently on the edge of my thronelike chair, they wondered whether I could possibly be any good. But, as I related earlier, the Opéra's directors had been searching for an Ortrud and vocally the role suited me down to the ground.

I had only four days' notice that I was to make my debut. Rouché, during his rounds of the rehearsal rooms, walked in one afternoon on Maurice Faure, with whom I was coaching, and myself. He asked about our progress on several roles.

"How about Ortrud," he asked after a pause. "Do you have that ready yet?"

"Yes, yes," I replied.

"*Bien,*" he said. "You will sing it next week."

"Next week! Yes, yes, *mon cher maître* . . . next week," I exclaimed as Rouché turned and walked off.

I had received a sound grounding in the role from Madame Gilly and subsequent rehearsing at the Opéra

and coaching with Maurice Faure and Pierre Chereau had made me word- and music-perfect in it and stage-sure. I therefore undertook the role with complete confidence, although the fact that I was making my debut in Paris did cause my nerves to jump a little.

They jumped even higher when the *Lohengrin* cast was posted and it was announced that Lubin would sing Elsa. During my student days Lubin had been one of my heroines. I worshiped her as an artist and had it not been for reports that she did not want me at the Opéra, I would have been overjoyed at singing with her. As it was, her presence in the *Lohengrin* cast scared me.

I was the only newcomer to the cast and as *Lohengrin* had been sung several times previously in preceding months, I had no orchestral rehearsal for my debut. We did have a couple of stage-and-piano rehearsals, but Lubin added to my worries by staying away from these.

My misgivings over the prima donna were mollified to some extent by the inclusion in the cast of Martial Singher, later of the Metropolitan, who was to sing Telramund. I had rehearsed with Singher many times and appreciated his fine baritone voice and artistic comradeship. I knew we would get along well.

I was glad that for the opening of the second act of *Lohengrin* during which, of course, Ortrud does most of her singing, Singher and I would be on the stage alone. I hoped that the scene with him would give me an opportunity to settle down and be prepared for anything and everything in the later duet with Lubin.

The music with Telramund did warm my voice and by the time I had to sing the Invocation, *"O Dieux de haine"* (*"Entweihte Götter"*) I was in top form and, as they say

along Broadway, I stopped the show—although the Paris Opéra, like other top-ranking opera houses, permits no pauses in the music that are not provided for in the score.

Applause thundered on long after I had finished the Invocation, but the conductor, François Ruhlmann, attempted to continue directly with the opera. He did not have a chance. I never had heard applause like it. I stood in the middle of the stage with my arms extended towards the heavens in that last wild appeal Ortrud makes to Wodan and Freia.

I paid scant attention to what Ruhlmann and the orchestra were trying to do down in the pit. That applause was a verdict. I had won my fight. I knew now that not a dozen Lubins could keep me from the Opéra. I was dimly aware of Lubin coming into the wings and singing her opening phrase before making her entrance.

"Ortrud, où donc es-tu?" she sang, but no one heard her.

Ruhlmann went back in the score and played up to her cue again. How she heard it over the bravos and applause I will never know but she did and for the second time, and a little louder, she sang *"Ortrud, où donc es-tu?"* But it was no good, the din went on. Finally Ruhlmann was compelled to wait for it to die down and, at the third attempt, we were able to proceed.

Now the fat was in the fire and sending up clouds of blue smoke! War between me and Lubin was on. At the end of the act when we took our bows she refused to shake my hand when I extended it to her and, being more practiced than I in the tricks of the opera trade, she was able to edge herself in front of me and behave as though all the cheering was for her.

I felt very small and jittery standing there behind her,

almost blotted out by her majestic figure. She successfully ignored my presence and, if the echoes of the applause that had followed the Invocation were not still pounding in my ears, I would have been very unhappy. As it was, Lubin's behavior provided me with any final conviction I needed that the day Madame Gilly had anticipated more than a year before had come: I had arrived.

Rouché came to my dressing room to congratulate me after the Opéra and told me to see him next day. And when I left the theater a large crowd had gathered near the artists' exit to cheer me. Critics were enthusiastic, too, likening my voice to that of the great Falcon, fabulous interpreter of dramatic soprano roles in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and *L'Africaine,* and Halévy's *La Juive,* roles that called for powerful dramatic voices of wide range, flexibility and agility.

The average opera house director, I imagine, would have patted himself on the back if he had (as Rouché had) tied up on a contract, and for quite a small fee, a young singer who seemed likely to bring audiences to his theater. Generally such a singer would be "kept in her place" and not permitted to develop ideas about herself which would prompt demands for more money.

Happily for me that was not the way Rouché ran the Paris Opéra. When I saw him the day after my debut his delight at my success was plain to see. And he made no attempt to hide it.

"I am very proud of you," he said as he took my hand.

He praised my singing, said we would have to tear up the old contract and make another more in keeping with my talent. My cup of happiness was full. Rouché overflowed it by asking what role I wanted to sing next.

"Brünnhilde in *La Valkyrie,*" I told him without a second's hesitation.

Rouché nodded. I think he must have heard about the way I had been doing Brünnhilde at rehearsals. This was *my* role. I have always imagined Brünnhilde as young, strong and active and I gave the part everything I had. As I sang the "Battle Cry" I leapt about the scenic cliffs waving my spear in a thoroughly warlike fashion. The Brünnhilde music could have been written for me, so perfectly did it fit my voice and, of course, the role provided me with far wider opportunities than Ortrud.

I sang my first Brünnhilde at the Paris Opéra two months after my debut. From then on the role *was* mine. Lubin offered stiffer opposition for some of the others, but Brünnhilde remained mine as long as I was at the Opéra.

By the end of 1933 I had given thirty-three performances at the Opéra, all of them in major roles. I never have sung a minor role. After Ortrud and Brünnhilde, I did Salomé in Massenet's *Hérodiade,* and a few weeks later created the role of Keltis in a new opera *Vercingétorix* by the French composer Canteloube. My other roles during that first year at the Paris Opéra included Rachel in *La Juive,* the title role in *Aïda* and Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung,* or *Le Crépuscule des Dieux,* as they call it in France. I think I might claim to have been responsible for the return of *Götterdämmerung* to the repertoire in Paris. Before I sang it in October, 1933, it had not been done for some time. Lubin, who had sung Brünnhilde for years, had begun to experience difficulty with the role, and until I came on the scene no one had been available to replace her in it.

18. Labor's Reward

AS I PROVED my ability and usefulness—I often took over roles at very short notice when Lubin was *"souffrante"* —Rouché steadily increased my salary until, at the end of 1934, I was among the most highly paid artists on his roster. Money never has loomed very importantly in my life, although I have come to appreciate its usefulness. Roles always have been my chief consideration, not the fees I receive for singing them. Actually I would be substantially better off today had I displayed more interest in the financial clauses of my contracts.

But how I welcomed the financial independence I achieved during my first year at the Paris Opéra. I paid all my debts and their settlement lifted a great weight from my mind. I took a magnificently situated seven-room apartment on rue Baudin overlooking the Square Montholon which, from its third-floor balcony, gave me a fine view of the Opéra looming at the end of the tree-lined boulevard. And with Eugènie, the Grodets' maid who came to look after me and the apartment, I settled down to a well-ordered life of calm comfort, the type of existence in which the vocal art flourishes. Such a life is positively essential for a singer in Paris where opera is performed the whole year round.

It is all very well for painters and writers to "suffer" and produce their masterpieces while starving to death in a

garret. But such an existence is not conducive to good singing. Highbrows may shudder at this; but a successful singer must live a timetable life. There must be regular, dietetically balanced meals; set hours for study and practice daily; and of course adequate exercise and rest. With my apartment, my maid, and sufficient francs coming in, I was able to lead such a life.

The new mode of existence did not cause me to slacken my efforts to improve my voice and broaden my musical knowledge. I was still a student (I still am) and experienced no tendency to take it easy. Rather, with my financial worries over and my niche well dug at the Opéra, I felt compelled to go on and to be satisfied with nothing short of occupying the very top rung of Paris' operatic ladder.

Being a Paris Opéra star is a most pleasant experience. You enjoy a very high community status. The people look up to you and respect you as a person of substance. I was able to entertain my artistic friends and have exhilarating visits with people such as Honegger and James Joyce. Your opera income is sufficient to save you from the financial necessity of engaging in stunts or enduring other kinds of artistic humiliation. It is not even necessary for you to engage agents to haggle over fees or to handle publicity on your behalf.

I continued to add to my repertoire during my second year at the Opéra. With the aid and inspiration of Bruno Walter and some intensified coaching from his assistant, Maurice Abravanel, I took over the role of Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* at a few hours' notice—a few of the most uncomfortable hours I ever spent. One was devoted to

learning to dance the minuet in Bruno Walter's hotel room with the maestro as my teacher.

There was more time to prepare my Dance of the Seven Veils for Strauss' *Salome* which was put back in the repertoire for me after I had given a concert performance of the music during 1933. My dance coach for this was the Russian, Sergito Majito, and the dance she taught me caused debate on both sides of the Atlantic. When Rouché saw the dance at a rehearsal he feared it would take too much out of me and impair my singing, but he was reassured when Pierre-Octave Ferroud, reviewing *Donna Anna* and *Salome* wrote in *Comédia: She has no actual rival in the world.* I sang *Salome* many times in Europe and America and was always able to cope with it.

My standing at the Paris Opéra became such that when the most famous international artists arrived for brief seasons I was invariably cast to sing with them. Quite early in my career I sang Ortrud in *Lohengrin* with Lauritz Melchior as the knight in shining armor and the German soprano Maria Müller doing Elsa. Lubin, by the way, never sang in *Lohengrin* with me again after my debut.

These artists and others, like Lotte Lehmann and Lily Pons, who made the Paris Opéra a regular port of call in their operatic junketings about the world, were responsible for taking my name to theaters in other countries. Before 1934 was over, offers of engagements had come from the New York Metropolitan, from the Vienna Staatsoper, and Covent Garden.

On Rouché's advice, and I am sure it was not animated by any selfish motive, I remained in Paris building up my voice and repertoire and gaining fuller stage experience. After all, what had these other theaters to offer, except

the glamor of travel, that the Paris Opéra was not giving me? Besides, my brother Cyril had at last come to Paris, wangling a passage somehow or other on a freighter. Having a member of my own family with me left me nothing more in life to wish for. I was perfectly content to settle down . . . for a while.

But only for a while.

My first invitation to the Metropolitan had come from Gatti-Casazza. Herbert Witherspoon, his successor as general manager, also had sounded me out about an engagement. I was somewhat shocked, therefore, in 1935 when I imagined I had become a "name," to have Eric Semon, talent agent for the Metropolitan in Europe, ask me if I would audition for Edward Johnson. Mr. Johnson had become general manager of the Metropolitan and he was in Paris looking for new singers.

"You may tell Mr. Johnson," I told Semon, "that I am at the Paris Opéra. He may come and hear me there."

But Eric Semon, an old hand in dealing with prima donnas—prima donna singers and prima donna managers—was not easily rebuffed and prevailed upon me to sing for Johnson and Artur Bodanzky, who was with him, at the Salle Gaveau. At their request I sang "Dich Theure Halle" in German and then, also at their request, the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung* in French.

Within a few days a contract arrived from the Metropolitan and, with Rouché's reluctant blessing, I was given leave from the Paris Opéra and went to New York late the same year. Mimi and Cyril came with me.

19. New York

HAD I MADE a snap judgment of New York, say three days after my arrival, I would have been as far off the beam as most people who try to sum up the wonder city after a brief acquaintance with it. We came to New York in mid-December, just in time for the first snow flurries and the first gray, miserable days of winter.

From the *Bremen* we went to the Astor Hotel, right in the middle of the boisterous, brash Times Square-Broadway district and, being unaccustomed to steam heating, were nearly parboiled during our first couple of days there. The Astor's rooms are no closer to being sweatboxes than those of any other New York hotel, but we found that hard to believe.

My throat was constantly parched and I wondered how anyone living such a hothouse existence could be expected to sing. With some alarm I mentioned this to Edward Johnson, but he laughed off my fears saying, "Oh, everyone thinks that at first. You'll get used to it."

He was wrong. I never have accustomed myself to living in overheated rooms and I keep my own New York apartment at what I think a comfortable temperature, even if I do shock visitors by having my windows open for at least part of the time every day of the year.

But my biggest letdown during my first days in New York was the Metropolitan itself. My Paris successes had

not made me so blasé that I was not impatient to see the opera house. And, just as I had insisted the day we arrived in Paris that Ada Boddington come with me to look at the Paris Opéra, I made Cyril and Mimi brave the New York cold and accompany me on the brief excursion from the Astor down Seventh Avenue to the Metropolitan.

Had we gone down Broadway to the Metropolitan's front door, rather than approached it from the rear, my first impression of it might not have been so shocking. (I use the word in its strictly literal sense.) But, after the rich beauty of the Paris Opéra and its picturesque surroundings, how could I have been prepared for the grimy old brick pile that met my eyes when we got down to Fortieth Street?

Stacked high on the sidewalk, covered with a tarpaulin which bore evidence of the visitation of myriad pigeons, were piles of scenery, presumably to be used in forthcoming productions. I was by no means reassured to discern the words "Walküre—Act I" (they might have been written by that heroic figure of Australian literature, Clancy of the Overflow, "with his thumbnail dipped in tar") on one "wing" from which the tarpaulin had been blown. I was scheduled to make my debut in *Die Walküre*.

I felt a little better when we walked alongside the opera house down Fortieth Street to the front entrance. Huge red and white posters announced imminent productions and among the singers listed to take part were many of the operatic elect: Melchior, Rethberg, Flagstad, Schorr, Hoffmann, Kipnis, Thorborg, Maison, Pinza.

Nowhere else in the world would you find such a star-spangled assemblage. If they could put up with the messy pigeons and the Met's grubby exterior, I could, too.

It is as unwise to judge an opera house from its outside as it is to judge a book from its cover. I was dazzled by the interior splendor of the Metropolitan when I saw it in full regalia a few nights later. The opulence of the Diamond Horseshoe with a king's ransom in diamonds and mink to the square foot; the devoted standees ranged all around the back of the house; and the half lights playing on the brass rails and red plush of the theater's many tiers, bestowed upon it all the glamor of operatic grandeur.

And the glorious voices! I listened and yearned impatiently to join them. As I have said, the Metropolitan's productions are not the smoothest and best-rehearsed but, because of its policy of plucking the finest voices from the world's operatic centers—including the Paris Opéra, La Scala, the Berlin State Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, the Royal Opera House of Stockholm, even Covent Garden—the Metropolitan is able to present its patrons with an unmatched array of vocal talent during its comparatively brief annual seasons.

The foregoing was truer before the war than it is now. It is painfully apparent that either the war has dried up the wells of European vocal talent or the Metropolitan's talent scouts are not as discerning as they used to be. This is not altogether bad. Young American singers are finding it easier to get into the Metropolitan and I am happy to see them making the most of the opportunity. In any case the new management under Rudolf Bing may well recruit some great new voices.

I had to get out of the Astor. I wanted to live somewhere where I could practice and where, if I felt like it, I could get a home-cooked meal. I knew nothing about New York eating habits and during my first week or so in the

city ate most of the time either in the Astor's dining room or at the Automat near the opera house.

Even after I began singing at the opera and the sheer novelty of nickel-in-the-slot eating had waned, I continued to eat at the Automat. The food was good, consistently so at any hour of the day or night, and the people who ate there fascinated me. However, a "tut-tut" from the Metropolitan management, passed on to me by Edyth Walker, finally put an end to my being an Automat patron.

At the beginning of my stay in New York, I was told, my going to the Automat had not mattered. But now, as my photograph was appearing in the newspapers and magazines, people would recognize me. The Metropolitan suggested, therefore, that I restrict my public eating to "nicer" places, more becoming to one of its stars.

Perhaps it was just as well I did stop going to the Automat, not for any ridiculous "social" reason but because I had become addicted to Automat apple pie. I had not seen pie, deep, full of fruit and crisp-crusted, since I left Australia. You never get pie, as Australians and Americans understand the word, in France. The French make good tarts, but tarts are not pie!

If I had kept on eating Automat pie as I did for the first several days after I "discovered" it, I would have finished that Metropolitan season waddling about the stage like most other Wagnerian sopranos. And that would not have done, because my physical agility had caused a minor sensation in New York. Bodanzky had started it by shouting out in the midst of our first *Die Walküre* rehearsal, "Good God! A Brünnhilde who can run!"

My second bad social break in New York was in moving from the Astor into an apartment on 42nd Street. This,

remember, was in 1935, before opera singers, like some other New York workers, became commuters and thought nothing of traveling seventy or eighty miles a day getting to and from their jobs. We saw the apartment advertised in a newspaper. It was not very elegant, we realized that when we saw it, but it was near the opera, I could practice in it and it had a kitchen of sorts, so we took it.

We probably would have remained in our 42nd Street abode until the season finished had not Eric Semon called one afternoon and urged us to quit it with all speed.

"Heavens above," Semon cried, "you can't stay here. This dump is bad enough, but do you know what is below it?"

"No," I said, "I don't."

"Don't you? Don't you?" shouted Semon. "Well, it's a flea circus—a flea circus!"

And, scratching himself vigorously, he fled.

We had noticed that our apartment was one of a number built over some kind of fun parlor on the street level, but we never had investigated it. We did not know, therefore, that the fun ran to fleas. We moved next day on Semon's advice into the world's most "musical" hotel, the Ansonia on Broadway.

When we saw it we lamented that we had not gone directly to the Ansonia on arrival. The Astor and other hotels in New York provide every conceivable creature comfort for the average person, but nowhere else in the world is there a hotel which, like the Ansonia, caters so meticulously to the comfort of peripatetic musicians. No wonder so many of them make their New York home there. My neighbors at the Ansonia included Lauritz Melchior, Alexander Kipnis, Bidu Sayao, René Maison, Salvatore

Baccaloni, Herbert Janssen and many others from the Metropolitan.

Melchior of course has made the Ansonia famous with his parties, some of them replete with rifle-shooting matches in the corridors, which he stages on special national days for his fellow Danes. I think it possible the Ansonia was deliberately designed to accommodate musicians and during my several years there I perceived only one oversight of which its planners were guilty: they did not install baths large enough to accommodate the Melchior bulk—and not enough water to bathe it at one time. During my first days at the Ansonia, I was intrigued to discover that my colleague and friend had to make a morning descent in the service elevator to the hotel basement to dunk himself in the swimming pool.

Apart from people from the Metropolitan, dozens of instrumentalists and teachers of every phase of the musical art from piccolo playing to voice production live at the Ansonia. Thank goodness the hotel's walls are thick and stout. Otherwise the place would be rendered uninhabitable by the practicing going on within them. And, I must add, Ansonia artists show extraordinary consideration for each other, restricting practicing to reasonable hours and taking care not to disturb the rest of the guests who have just given or are about to give exacting performances.

Cyril, Mimi and I loved the Ansonia at first sight and when I went back to Paris at the end of my first Metropolitan season, Cyril stayed on in our apartment there. It became our home for gradually extending periods annually as I increased, season by season, the amount of time I spent at the Metropolitan. Rouché did not like my grow-

ing absences from Paris, but New York had put its spell upon me and when that happens there is no throwing it off.

From the outset the Metropolitan accorded me the full honors due to an artist who had established herself as a leading singer in one of the world's great opera houses. And when I made my New York debut, as Brünnhilde in *Walküre,* the Metropolitan drew deeply upon its vocal riches to give me a superlative cast. Friedrich Schorr was Wotan (in my estimation he was the finest Wotan of them all), Elizabeth Rethberg sang Sieglinde, Melchior was my Siegmund and Bodanzky conducted.

I was fairly sure of myself by now but when I realized the full splendor of the cast with which I was to sing, I knew I would have to be right on my toes, not only to make the impression I wished at my New York debut but to prove my worthiness to sing with these artists.

We used to say in Paris that an infallible guide to how one's voice is to behave at night is for a singer to leap from bed directly on waking in the morning and, without any preparation more than a good, deep breath, sing a sustained top *C.* At seven o'clock on the morning of my Metropolitan debut, December 18, 1935, I applied that test in my bedroom. The *C* was full, round and steady. I was in a happy mood for the rest of the day.

Just for a moment before the curtain went up for the second act of *Walküre* that night at the Metropolitan, I had a mild attack of nervous apprehension when again I was assailed by the fact that I was to sing at this world-famous theater and probably with the most brilliant cast that could be assembled. But the audience gave me a warming hand of applause directly I appeared and after

that I let the music and my natural inclination to sing do the rest.

I will let the critics tell the actual story of the night. Olin Downes of the *New York Times*: *The audience was taken by storm and a burst of applause interrupted the performance.* Samuel Chotzinoff of the *Post* said *Young, slim and personable, the new soprano gave to Brünnhilde a youthful charm and motion. From a dramatic standpoint her Brünnhilde was the most effective that the Metropolitan has seen in years.*

Leonard Liebling in the *New York American* reported: *The chief interest lay in the presence of the new Brünnhilde. Possessor of a fresh, amply powered and richly timbered voice, an intelligent interpreter and actress, she is mobile in movement and suggests the youth and romantic exuberance of Brünnhilde.*

And Pitts Sanborn, then the *World-Telegram*'s musical authority, mentioned in his critique that "rounds of applause greeted both the first and second Valkyrie cries, and after Act II the audience gave the debutante an ovation."

Rummaging through those old clippings today, I appreciate their enthusiasm because I know now that by New York standards they were lavish praise indeed. But when I read them on the morning after the performance they left me a little cold. After the lush eloquence of European critics, the New Yorkers were too restrained for my complete happiness. Only as the day wore on and friends, fellow artists and unknown members of the previous night's audience rang to congratulate me on my performance and on the way the critics had received me, was I reassured and convinced I had been a success.

And when you come to think of it, it is just as well New York critics are not stampeded by a svelte figure and a couple of resonant top *C*'s. Nowhere else in the world are there critics possessed of such power. They are essentially oracular in their pronouncements and no doubt there are some members among New York music audiences who are uncertain whether or not they heard a good performance until they read their newspapers.

Happily my good relations with New York's critics have persisted although, inevitably, there have been those few occasions when their remarks about me were anything but glowing. My dear friend and, as he called himself, my "vocal adviser," the late Louis Bachner, with whom I worked after coming to the United States, made a joke out of one aspect of my New York criticisms. As each season progressed, the gentlemen of the press invariably would report that my voice was improving. "Better than before," they wrote. And Bachner, as he read their words, would chuckle and declare they were a tribute to the effectiveness of his "advice"—which, I hasten to add, they were. Bachner, a genuine master, helped me a great deal, and his book *Dynamic Singing* should be required reading for every serious vocal student.

To return to the critics: I am sure that if they had not put their seal of approval on my work I would not have become a Metropolitan "regular" as I was from 1935 to 1941. Each season during that time I gave an increasing number of performances and sang new roles. Apart from Wagner, these included Rachel in *La Juive*, the title roles in *Alceste* and *Thaïs* (John Charles Thomas giving his incomparable performance of Athanael in the latter) and *Salome*.

Salome had not been performed for three years at the Metropolitan before my appearance in it during the 1937-1938 season. It was the Metropolitan's "sensation piece" for that year. Ettore Panizza conducted and my associates in the cast were René Maison (Herod), Karin Branzell (Herodias) and Julius Huehn (Jokanaan). My recordings of the Strauss opera, made in Paris, had preceded me to the United States and helped arouse public interest in the production. Incidentally, I was told that the master discs of these recordings disappeared during the German occupation of Paris.

Students of operatic history will recall that the first Metropolitan performance of *Salome* was given in January, 1907, with the mighty Olive Fremstad as its star. They will recall, too, the furore the production created and how the shocked conservative element among the Metropolitan's patrons caused the opera to be struck from the repertory after a single performance. It was not restored until 1934 when, from what I have been told, a rather "refined" version was presented by Göta Ljungberg.

Herbert Graf, who staged our 1938 revival, trusting in a growing sophistication among operagoers, offered them what was, in the words of Oscar Thompson in *Musical America,* "relatively speaking, an honest *Salome,* with less subterfuge and squeamishness than characterized the Metropolitan performances of four years ago."

For my part, I made the controversial Dance of the Seven Veils even less restrained than I had at the Paris Opéra. I evolved my new version with the assistance of that accepted authority on Oriental dancing, Yeichi Nimura, and worked with him for weeks in his Carnegie Hall dance studio. Mary Garden, continuing her interest

in my interpretation of what once had been "her" role, came along for the final rehearsal at the Metropolitan. She attended the opening performance, too, evoking comment in the newspapers with her "admiring remarks and excited nods of approval."

Salome, as I sang and danced the role, was exacting physically and emotionally, but it was immensely satisfying artistically. Like that other prodigious Strauss one-acter, *Elektra,* the music takes complete possession of its interpreters and compels complete surrender to its demands. But I was well rewarded for my work in preparing and performing *Salome* at the Metropolitan. Audiences were gracious and warmhearted and the critics threw restraint to the winds.

Olin Downes of the *New York Times* said I was "the finest Salome the rising generation of Americans had seen." And the *Herald Tribune's* Jerome Bohm wrote: *It was a remarkable feat for a singing actress who has not been trained as a dancer to have surmounted an all but insurmountable problem so convincingly and to have sung the tremendous closing scene of the opera so magnificently.*

In Brooklyn, too, my performance was acclaimed, Miles Kastendieck writing in the *Eagle* that mine was a Salome that had no rival and was one that would not be forgotten in the annals of operatic history.

Yes, they were wonderful, happy, exciting years I spent at the Metropolitan! Looking back on them, my one regret is that I did not come to New York a year earlier. As it was, Kirsten Flagstad arrived the season before me and in that season with her superb voice took complete possession of the role of Isolde. Flagstad and I alternated in the various other leading Wagnerian soprano roles and had a mutual

admiration for each other's accomplishments, but she never relaxed her grip on Isolde. I never did sing Isolde on my feet at the Metropolitan although I did do it there—seated. But that is another part of my story and the time to tell it is not yet.

There were other roles I would have liked to sing at the Metropolitan: *Tosca,* for instance, which I sang often in Europe and in Philadelphia and Cleveland while on tour with the Metropolitan company; Telaïre in Rameau's *Castor et Pollux,* which was so well received when I sang it in Buenos Aires in 1936; Valentine in *Les Huguenots; Carmen* and *Aïda*—all of which I had sung in Europe. At the Metropolitan, however, singers are typed. I had been engaged primarily for the German wing and because I was from the Paris Opéra I was given some French roles, too. But rarely do leading members of the Metropolitan's German wing sing anything outside Wagner which, in these days when there is not an oversupply of operatic vocal talent, is rather unfortunate.

For the several years that I sang in French at the Paris Opera and in German at the Metropolitan, only once was I confused by the change. This occurred during my second season at the Met during a performance of "Die Walküre," a few days after my arrival from Paris. Just before going on stage I had been conversing with the stage director Desiré Defrère in French. I climbed onto Brünnhilde's rock and as the curtain rose I began Brünnhilde's Battle Cry, "Ho Yo To Ho," which is the same in any language. But then, to the consternation of the conductor, prompter, stage director, and audience, I lustily sang the next few phrases in French. Bodanzky on his podium, the prompter in his box, and Defrère in the wings gesticulated wildly

and shouted to me the text in German. So I changed languages in midair and hoped the transfer was not too noticeable. But the next day Olin Downes mentioned it prominently in his review of the opera.

Two other events completed my initiation into the Honorable Order of Metropolitan Opera Singers: I permitted my name to be used to advertise a brand of cigarettes, and Ezio Pinza declared himself to be in love with me. Both occurrences had their humorous aspects; both were in the Metropolitan tradition.

The request to "endorse" the cigarette carried an offer of so many dollars that, although I never had smoked a cigarette or anything else, I was impelled to accede to it. I let myself in for more than I bargained. There was a conference with executives of the cigarette company at which they made a terrific fuss over me. That I enjoyed. I did not enjoy trying to smoke the cigarette they pressed upon me.

But there was no dodging it. I was about to be paid for telling the American people that I enjoyed smoking this brand of cigarette; that it was cool, refreshing, mild and all the rest; that it was not harmful to the throat, heart, stomach or any other part of the anatomy. The least I could do was to try one. I drew too hard when the thing was lit for me and nearly exploded. Tears tumbled from my eyes, but I tried hard to make believe I was a regular smoker and puffed away like any ancient locomotive.

I deluded no one. Smiles on the faces of the cigarette men told me that. Nevertheless, for weeks afterwards my face grinned at me through a cloud of cigarette smoke from posters, newspapers and magazines which carried the endorsement for which I had been asked. My fee,

as I said, for this gentle piece of subterfuge was large. But I felt I had earned it.

During my first Australian concert tour I agreed to give a testimonial to a brand of bicycle. As part of this deal I had to ride a bicycle while photographs were taken. This was easy, as I had always enjoyed bike riding. I could not help thinking, though, that if my bike riding had been on a par with my cigarette smoking, I surely would have broken my neck that morning in Melbourne!

The Pinza "episode" occurred after we had given a joint recital near Chicago. Driving back to the city, Pinza clutched my hand and fervently declared he had adored me since the first time he saw me. Cyril was with us and the basso lamented he could not talk freely in my brother's hearing. But, he pleaded, there were so many things he yearned to tell me. Could he not see me later that evening?

Striving to play out the scene as comedy, I laughingly told Signor Pinza that I did not think anything he might have to say would stale if it remained unsaid until the following morning. Tonight we were both tired after our concert.

Summing up the situation without my having to say a word to him, Cyril did a magnificent job running interference for me when we got into the hotel lobby. I was able to bid the ardent signor a quick over-the-shoulder good night and escape safely to my room.

This was before the celebrated basso's last marriage and long before his great success in musical comedy, in *South Pacific*. Now I hear he is far less impulsive.

20. Wagner in Germany

BESIDES SHARING with the rest of humanity its well-founded loathing and detestation of the Nazis, I have my own special and particular reasons for hating Hitler and his hoodlum pack. They and the ghastly war they foisted upon the world prevented my attaining the ambition of every Wagnerian singer—to appear in the master's operas at hallowed Bayreuth. I went to Germany for the first time to sing at the Zoppot Waldoper and was invited to return, not only for Zoppot but for Berlin and Bayreuth as well the following year: but the following year was 1939!

Zoppot is a Baltic resort near Danzig and leading singers from the German opera houses came there for the annual outdoor opera festival. I was engaged for the Waldoper by an agent who heard me during the Metropolitan's 1937-1938 season. I was to sing Brünnhilde in *Walküre* and *Siegfried* and the prospect of singing Wagner in Germany delighted me. The Waldoper's agent seemed happy, too, at having been able to engage me. He regarded it as a booking coup.

His colleagues at Zoppot, it transpired, were not so happy about my engagement—despite the fact that, unknown to me, a thorough check of my ethnic background had revealed no "taint." I not only was "pure Aryan" but looked it!

Between the end of the Metropolitan season and going to Germany I had to make a number of appearances at the Paris Opéra. Cyril and I were impatient for these to be over so that we could be on our way to Zoppot. The agent in New York had talked in such terms that I imagined the people would receive me with acclaim and in a manner befitting a foreigner who had furthered the cause of German opera abroad.

As the train drew near Zoppot I put a final dab of powder on my cheeks and Cyril gave an adjusting tug at his tie. We had to be looking our best for the reception committee we expected to greet us. I was wearing a very modish Paquin model finished for me only a few days previously in Paris. Had I known the Waldoper people better, especially had I been aware of how little they were anticipating me and my singing, I would have left the Paquin creation in Paris where such things are appreciated and not regarded as manifestations of artistic decadence.

We alighted from the train and looked up and down the platform for a welcoming hand. There was none. Information regarding our time of arrival had been sent ahead but, it appeared, no one cared whether I arrived or not. The reason for this indifference, I discovered, was that the Waldoper people had seen my photographs and read the outpourings of high-powered American publicity men about my work. They had been disappointed before by flashes in the operatic pan foisted upon them by Hollywood and New York, and the conductor Robert Heger and his colleagues, as he admitted later, feared I was another.

Anxious to know precisely how matters stood, we sent our bags to a hotel and drove out to the Waldoper. With Heger in charge, a rehearsal of *Walküre* was under way

in the rehearsal hall when we arrived. I waited for a pause in the music and introduced myself. Heger looked hard at me, appraising the Paquin dress. I imagined he was admiring it but I know now he was telling himself his worst fears had been fulfilled: I had all the earmarks of another American "sensation," fashionable but not vocal.

I smiled at the other singers, but their frigidness was enough to wither the leaves of the surrounding forest. A year or two earlier this cold-shoulder treatment would have driven me to tears, but successful seasons in New York, Paris, Buenos Aires and other important cities had made me very sure of myself. Instead of being dismayed by the plump fräuleins and their heel-clicking red-faced tenors and baritones, I determined to show them what I could do. They might be Wagner's compatriots, but that gave them no monopoly of the ability to sing his music.

Challengingly, Heger suggested I take part in the rehearsal. I was in the mood to accept challenges and I gave the Brünnhilde part everything I had—including ringing top *C*'s in the Battle Cry. I knew Heger and the German singers were impressed but they were determined not to accept me too easily.

When we had finished *Walküre* Heger pointed out that August Seider, of the Leipzig State Opera, who had sung Siegmund, would also be doing *Siegfried* with me. Why not go through Act III of *Siegfried* while we were together? This was another challenge. Although the Brünnhilde role in *Siegfried* does not entail nearly the same amount of singing as it does in *Walküre,* it is a test for any soprano.

Restricted as it is to the last act of the opera, Brünnhilde's music in *Siegfried* demands absolute certainty in

the upper reaches of the voice and a capacity for pure *bel canto*. When I had sung it, Heger and everyone else in the Waldoper was prepared to admit I was worthy of singing with them. But my pride was hurt and I was not going to let them off lightly. I finished the duet with a terrific top *C* that surprised even myself.

"Good, good," shouted Heger, putting down his baton to applaud. "I wonder Wagner himself does not leave his grave to acclaim such top notes." I felt I had won.

Singing in *Walküre* at the Waldoper was one of my most unforgettable operatic experiences. High on a mountainside, so high I felt sure as I began to sing the second act music that I could have reached up and plucked a star from the purple sky, the Waldoper stage had been built around clumps of gigantic blackwood trees. (No chance of Siegmund pulling one of these over when he withdrew the Walsung's sword from the tree trunk in Act I of *Walküre*.) And those trees and the surrounding rocks were the "scenery" for the opera.

As soon as I began singing, I knew the claims for the Waldoper's perfect acoustics were well-founded. Down below the stage, and stretching back as far as I could see, was the vast audience, beholding with religious reverence and awe what was taking place before them. I could positively feel this throng of about fifteen thousand going through the music with me, missing no particle of its beauty nor of its dramatic and emotional impact.

To be singing Wagner in German to Germans was in itself a stimulation. Here I knew I had an audience not only appreciative of Wagner's music but of his text as well. Before the opera ended, a heavy mist descended upon the Waldoper. It heightened the illusion of the closing

scenes, but must have chilled the audience to the marrow. But on they sat, silent, unmoving, completely preoccupied and entranced.

Next morning Cyril and I went for a walk round Zoppot and to our amazement were followed at a very respectful distance (none of your American or Australian autograph hunters here) by a crowd of people. It started with a small group who obviously had come from another part of the country for the opera festival, but soon these were augmented by *hausfraus* who stopped their marketing and, with baskets hooked over their arms and huge smiles on their full-moon faces, walked after us.

When we told Heger and other people at the opera of the incident they said I had been signally honored and that the demonstration was a traditional method of showing appreciation of a singer who had won the festival patrons' not easily given approval. During the horrible years of the war, as the German people's crimes against humanity mounted, so did my bewilderment mount that such pleasant, earnest, seemingly intelligent people as those I saw at Zoppot could have sunk to such foul depths.

My success in *Walküre* completely won over the Waldoper directors. They even attempted to break their agreement with the soprano who was to sing *Götterdämmerung*, but she was an important personage and insisted on singing. The directors, however, promised I would sing *Götterdämmerung* at the Waldoper when I returned to Germany the following year to accept the offers they knew I had received to sing at Berlin and Bayreuth.

That drab, tragic figure of history, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, had already returned to London from his fateful talks with Hitler, waving his unfortunate umbrella and

proclaiming peace in our time. I claim no profounder political prescience than Britain's former Prime Minister but, as I listened to the talk about my returning to Germany in 1939, it struck me as unreal. I knew I would not be coming back that quickly. No human being possessed of the slightest sensitivity could be in Germany in those days and not realize that the world tottered on the brink of doom; that war was inevitable and could not be long delayed.

In the larger cities like Berlin, I could not shake off an apprehensiveness that I was constantly being watched and living in a police state. I caused a sensation in a music shop by asking for the score of a song cycle by the Jewish composer Gustav Mahler. Not until I had answered questions about my nationality, the purpose of my being in Germany, and what I needed the music for, was a copy produced from a hiding place and handed to me as though it were a hatful of vipers.

When you have been brought up in a completely democratic country among people who, perhaps not overwisely, take their democratic rights for granted, it is difficult to convince yourself that you can be spied upon, to believe that it is necessary to use discretion in choosing your friends and in your conversation. Because I had not been so conditioned, I was guilty of behavior in Berlin that might have had serious repercussions for myself and other people.

Knowing I was going to Germany, several refugee musicians at the Metropolitan, including my coach and accompanist, Felix Wolfes, urged me to get what news I could of their families still in the Reich. In asking me to do this my colleagues presumed I would be discreet and cautious

in my inquiries. But, unlike Felix and his compatriots, I never had experienced political or racial persecution and, despite my apprehension, it was not in my nature to be discreet or cautious.

Directly time was available, I began making calls on the musicians' families whose addresses I possessed. I did so openly, as one would in Australia, France or America. Grateful though the people were for word of their kin in the United States, I perceived, as I continued to see them, a growing nervousness and tension. They guessed I was being watched and trembled lest my visits have dread consequences.

Ultimately their fears were communicated to me. I, too, became afraid and longed to flee the terror-stricken country. Wherever I went . . . to the beaches, the parks, theaters, shops, cafés, hotels . . . the ghastly slogan *Juden Verboten* stalked my eye. And the ubiquitous jack-booted soldiery and their monstrous tanks clattering about Berlin's streets struck cold terror in my heart!

I felt like a prisoner released from jail when my stay in Germany ended. Cyril and I were escorted to the border by a government official who handed over the money I had earned at Zoppot, and in the currency I had stipulated —United States dollars. He saw us to our railway compartment, thanked me for having come to Germany, saluted and strutted off. As he did, the words "good riddance" came unbidden to my lips. The blast from the locomotive as the train moved across the border into France was as soothing to my mind, as cheering to my flagging spirits, as any music ever written.

I looked at Cyril, he at me. We were very close to each other and had refrained as far as possible from discussing

our emotional discomfort during those last days in Germany. Each knew what the other was experiencing. There was no necessity to talk about it. But now that we had emerged from the darkness to the light, we were able to let go and we gave vent to our relief in a wild spontaneous burst of near-hysterical laughter.

Back in Paris the war fever was mounting, too. My baggage containing the spear, helmet and shield I used for *Walküre* was delayed for days until inspectors at the Gare du Nord made sure I was not engaged in smuggling lethal weapons. And I was no sooner in my apartment than I was besieged with news that this friend had been called up, this regiment had been alerted for duty. Yet they were still talking about peace in our time!

Even if the war had not begun I could not have brought myself to go back to Germany while the Nazis were in power; not even if Hitler himself had invited me to Bayreuth. I lament not having sung at Bayreuth, but so far as 1939 was concerned there was excitement enough in store for me. I was going home—back to Australia for my first concert tour which was to be under the management of Archie Longden, the young Australian entrepreneur who had been among the guests at the Jess Brownlee tea party at which I made so undistinguished an appearance soon after coming to Paris.

21. Home Again!

HAPPY THOUGH I was at the prospect of going home to Australia, of seeing my family and singing to my own people, my happiness was not free of a tincture of trepidation. I knew my fellow countrymen and the stern critical standards they impose on Australians in any field of endeavor when they come home after having been abroad. I knew, too, their detestation of anything like "side" or affectation, and their contempt for returning travelers bringing home the faintest stain of foreign accent on their speech.

Australians have been described as a race of "knockers" with a predilection for knocking compatriots who raise their heads above the herd. This, I feel, is not entirely accurate although (and of this I am positive) Australians are not given to hero worship. And that is not a bad thing. Had the unhappy Germans and Italians been less prone to hero worshiping they might not be in their present humiliating mess.

Writing about these things today in the secluded security of my Arkansas ranch is pleasant and amusing; mulling over them as our ship approached the Australian coast in 1939 was much less comfortable.

We sailed into Sydney Harbor on a glorious morning in late autumn. The deep blue waters of the harbor, the houses clinging to the surrounding cliffs, the trees, even

the sky and the fluffy, scudding clouds gleamed as though they had been scrubbed and polished that very hour. I had savored the splendor of Naples and Rio but, after that morning of my home-coming, Sydney's always will be for me the world's most beautiful harbor. The shapely contours of its many bays, the majestic city in the background, the massive bridge that links its shores and, above all, the brilliant colors of the water, sky and shore line, intoxicate the senses and stagger one's capacity for comparison.

A launch bearing government health and other officials, newspaper people—and Archie Longden—nudged against the side of our ship some distance outside the Heads. I had left Archie in Paris and as he came hand over hand up the Jacob's ladder and onto the deck, I felt he symbolized my next big adventure, singing to Australians. Cyril and Felix Wolfes, who was to be my accompanist, had traveled with me from San Francisco and, after our first boisterous greetings, Archie Longden excitedly told us of arrangements for the tour and the interest it had aroused.

Archie had a packet of clippings from Australian newspapers retelling with articles and pictures the story of my career. The Melbourne *Sun-Pictorial* had sent a photographer to Winchelsea and Dean's Marsh and he had done a wonderful job ransacking family albums for photographs of myself when young. One clip Archie brought with him was a two-page spread of photographs the *Sun* man had collected. Here I was, aged eight, riding a horse; here, a few years later, milking a cow; and here, feeding an orphan lamb from a baby's milk bottle. None of the photographs was very flattering, but as I looked at them the years rolled

back. The whole drama of my home-coming confronted me.

Our stop in Sydney was brief. We were to return there later. By train we made the overnight journey to Melbourne and as we tore down through the hills over the last hundred miles, the beauties of the Australian countryside were framed in the windows of our compartment: the soft blue gums (what pallid objects their California cousins are by comparison); the rich green of the new season's grass; the colorful autumn wild flowers; the forever-munching sheep; the sturdy crops; the rich brown earth. It was home, my home, and it was good to be there.

Archie Longden had said something about a public reception in Melbourne, but I had no conception of what was in store for us as the train pulled in. I wonder who milked the cows in Winchelsea and Dean's Marsh that day! The entire population seemed gathered on the main platform of Spencer Street Railway Station when we arrived. A district school holiday had been declared and pupils from Dean's Marsh and Winchelsea were gathered in a group in front of the welcoming throng. In the forefront was a score of youngsters, nieces and nephews, all born since my departure, who steadily chanted, "Hello, Auntie Marge . . . Hello, Auntie Marge." My brothers, my dear sister Eileen, aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors, friends, local celebrities . . . all were on hand. And, of course, so were hundreds of Melbourne's music lovers and members of the general public.

What a day! I still marvel I survived it: all the happiness, all the tears, the kissing, handclasping, hello-how-are-you's and the surely-you-remember-me's. The lump in my throat grew bigger by the minute and I was close to a break-

down when Archie and four hefty Melbourne bobbies forced a path through the crowd and bundled us into a couple of waiting cars. Up the Collins Street hill we drove and along to the Menzies Hotel, the Ritz-Carlton of Melbourne, where we were to stay. (Only about a mile away was the sweatshop where I had spent those unhappy weeks not so very long before, sewing buttons down the front of numberless wretched frocks!) Three or four crazy days in my beloved Melbourne followed. I had time only to glimpse the rich beauties of the stately, garden-surrounded metropolis, but I did manage to set aside one afternoon to give a party for my new-found nieces and nephews. Then we set out—Archie Longden, Felix Wolfes, Cyril and myself, followed by a motorcade of newsmen and photographers—for Winchelsea where I was to give my first concert.

With an old friend of the Lawrence family, Ernie Caldow, carrying a large Australian flag and riding at their head, two hundred of Winchelsea's citizens mounted on every type of steed—hunters, hacks, broken-down racehorses and *brumbies*—met us on the outskirts of the town. (I have been told since that I am the only person in Australian history to be honored by such a "horseback" reception.) As they bore down on us, Felix Wolfes blinked rapidly several times. Felix had spent a lifetime traveling about the world with musicians, but this was something completely outside his ken. He had been magnificent in Melbourne, coping nobly with hordes of relatives, friends and others who deluged him with stories of my long-forgotten, quite unimportant past. Further tests for his nobility were ahead—like living in an unheated farmhouse during an Australian winter and coping with the intrica-

cies and discomforts of outdoor plumbing during that same chilly season.

Ernie Caldow and his riders preceded us to the Shire Hall at Winchelsea, where the townspeople had gathered in force for a civic reception. The old bluestone building, just off the highway, had been bedecked for the occasion with finery from half a dozen nearby drawing rooms. There were speeches galore, more kissing, weeping and, being an Australian bush gathering, much concentrated eating of home-cooked delicacies washed down with oceans of thick strong tea. Proceedings gradually edged their way towards their climax—the presentation to me of an illuminated address of welcome by the civic fathers.

That same night the town again turned out in force to attend a ball in my honor at the Globe Theatre, where twenty-four hours later I was to give my concert. Horses and carts, slick limousines bearing the local aristocracy, farmyard jalopies by the score, even push bikes brought in the crowd from miles around. I danced all night and the ball provided me with an opportunity to talk easily with droves of old friends and acquaintances. I was shocked to see how time had dealt with some of them. For some inexplicable reason when you leave a place as I had left Winchelsea, you return expecting to find people looking just as they did when you went away. You are not prepared for the changes the years bring to all of us.

There were, for instance, among the dancers women who had been girls at school when I went away. It was incredible that now they should be quitting the dance floor every so often and half-running to the cloakroom to see if all went well with their infants whom they had left there wrapped up snugly and sleeping in commodious

old-fashioned clothesbaskets. Time had not been overkind to some of these young mothers. They looked as though they worked hard and carried a full load of cares. Perhaps they envied me the fame which had come to me and the incidental "good times" it brought. I doubt they guessed that I, too, knew a pang of jealousy as I watched them, that indescribable mother-look in their eyes, peering into the baskets bearing their precious bundles.

But it was a glorious home-coming, even if it was not free from sadnesses, the least easy to bear, of course, being that Father was not among my welcomers. How he would have thrilled to see his friends and neighbors honoring his daughter; how he would have enjoyed the dance at the Globe and the other festivities. At every turn in Winchelsea I was reminded of him and I was constantly meeting people who had known him and wanted to talk about him.

I was distressed, too, because Lindsay had sold our old home and farm. While I was away I had always pictured it as it had been when we lived on it: solid fences, well-kept pastures, upstanding, healthy crops and the house and sheds as spic and span as constant care could make them. The new owners, unhappily, had let it become run-down, and when my brother Ted took me out to look at the place I had the feeling I was calling on a once-beautiful friend who had not only lost her good looks but had fallen on hard times. What with a visit to the farm and a pilgrimage to Father's grave, I was not in the best of spirits for my Globe Theatre concert that second night home.

Father had built the Globe and until recently I was, with other members of the family, a part owner of it. The Globe is a very plain-Jane edifice of corrugated iron sheets

and timber, but it served as a community gathering place and as a home for the Saturday night motion picture show. A tin roof is its major drawback as a concert hall: only a brass band can surmount the din if rain falls during a performance. Actually there was a brief noisy shower during my concert but it was quickly over and, apart from giving the newsreel cameramen perched outside the windows a wetting, caused no inconvenience.

Incongruously the people of Winchelsea were distressed that no grander hall was available for me than the Globe—my own theater. The Gubbins family, who have been raising sheep in the Winchelsea district for years, insisted that their Steinway, the best in the shire, be used at my concert and Mr. Allan McDonald, now a member of the Australian Parliament, removed the tallboy mirror from his wife's wardrobe and put it in the Globe's dressing room for me. When I got to the theater, saw the crowd and the full-blooded community effort that had gone into making the concert a success, I forgot the more distressing aspects of my return and determined to give of my best.

Felix and I opened with Schubert's "Die Allmacht." If ever my singing were inspired it was then as I sang Schubert's mighty hymn to God's divine greatness and power to the hushed, expectant audience. The program that followed was identical with one we might have given in San Francisco, Chicago or New York. I sang that night the music that has appealed to me as the most sublime in vocal literature. After the Schubert we did Bach, Brahms and Schumann, some French songs, and finished with what most probably was the one and only performance of the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung* ever given in the Globe Theatre. There were a few folk songs and bal-

lads especially requested by old friends, without which the home-coming concert would not have been complete either for my audience or me. Occasionally I have been criticized for including folk songs in my concerts. Some people have even said that these folk songs have no musical value. I wonder if they realize the folk song is the foundation of the art song the world over, and if sung with sincerity and artistry is always worthy of being heard.

Before the concert was over I had completely laid low the worry that had nagged me from the day I set out for Australia. My own people did like me and my singing. Critics from the metropolitan newspapers who had come up for the concert put their seal of approval on my work in their pieces published next day. And what a relief that was! That Winchelsea concert was as important to me as a human being, if not as a professional artist, as my debut in Monte Carlo or my first appearances in Paris, New York or Buenos Aires. With its safe accomplishment, I was able to set forth on the rest of my tour joyfully and confidently.

We gave a fantastic number of concerts, far in excess of those originally planned. To fit them in (I had to be back in San Francisco for the opening of the opera season), we sometimes gave two in one day. There would be a matinee at Geelong and then a drive of forty-odd miles to Melbourne for a night appearance there. The Melbourne Town Hall seats well over two thousand people. I gave half a dozen concerts in it but still the crowds kept coming. We could get no more dates for the Town Hall so Archie Longden hired the Princess Theatre, a multitiered old theater of fading Edwardian splendor built for drama and opera. We filled that up, too.

I sang everything in my concert repertoire: Bach, Bee-

thoven, Brahms, Schumann, Wolf, Richard Strauss, Wagner; the modern Englishmen; French, German and Italian opera. Would to heaven I had been able to appear in opera in my own country but, as I have said, opera seasons are few and far between at home. We approached as closely as we could to opera at one Sydney concert when, with Felix conducting, I sang the music from the closing scenes of *Salome* and *Götterdämmerung* with the Sydney Symphony.

Quite apart from the actual music, every concert during that tour was a happy, if somewhat bewildering, experience. So many wanted to see me after each concert that Archie finally organized reception lines. While I stood like some grande dame, he would march the people past to shake my hand and say good night. And the presents I received! Gardens-full of flowers, candy and fruit by the carload, and home-baked cookies and cakes galore. One admirer sent me a decorated basket full of succulent crabs. And one night in Melbourne, after I had mentioned in a broadcast that the Australian dish I had missed most while abroad had been rabbit pie, a monster version of this still-favorite luncheon course of mine was carried down the aisle by an usher and placed at my feet. It was most artistically packed with cellophane and red ribbon so that I got quite a shock when I discovered what lay beneath the wrappings.

22. Crest of the Wave

THERE WERE times during my student days in Paris and while I strove to establish myself as an opera singer when I doubted if there could be any reward commensurate with the sacrifices, setbacks and disappointments that beset my path. Was it conceivable that the ultimate triumph—supposing I did achieve it—would be worth the price I was paying for it?

I was not sure of the answer to that conundrum until the 1940-1941 music season in New York. That was my wonder season. Entrepreneurs all over the United States, Canada and Latin-America were shouting for me to sing for them. I was sought for concerts here, broadcasts there and opera everywhere. Endeavoring to keep my engagements to reasonable proportions, I raised my fees to fantastic figures, but there was no slackening in the demand for my services.

Yes, by 1940-1941 I had climbed high enough to look back and see in perspective the rough places and the plain of my career. And when I looked, I had no doubts. My struggle had been well rewarded. Not only had I experienced the sublime joy of singing the most glorious operatic music ever written in great opera houses all over the world, but I had given recitals in many countries and sung as soloist with famous orchestras in Europe and the United States.

In America I had sung with symphonies under the batons of men like Barbirolli, Ormandy, Rodzinski, Goossens and Kindler. I had returned to Monte Carlo, scene of my operatic debut, for a symphony concert with Mitropoulos. In Belgium I had sung with Defauw; in France, with Gaubert, Elmendorff, Monteux, Paul Paray and Albert Wolff. To have sung with conductors of their caliber, the musical elect of our times, and to have them treat me as their artistic equal while I was still at an age where most singers are cutting their professional teeth, was a rewarding and soul-satisfying experience.

And, in addition to my regular seasons at the Paris Opéra and the Metropolitan, I made frequent appearances at French provincial operas like those of Marseilles, Lille, Nantes and Lyon of whose discerning audiences and competent productions I have already written. Unlike some of my colleagues at the Paris Opéra, I was always willing to take my reputation in my hands and sing before the critical, knowledgeable provincials to whom reputations meant so little.

It was at Lyon after my second Metropolitan season in 1937 that I sang my first Isolde; there, too, that season I did Brunehild in Reyer's *Sigurd.* Charles Varigny, critic of *Le Petit Provençal,* said that the Isolde was "the most admirable we have heard."

Here is a superb dramatic soprano, he wrote. *The timbre is magnificent and the production as remarkable for its smoothness as it is for its volume. Her lower notes have a richness and an extremely velvet quality and her top scintillates with a warm brilliance.* After *Sigurd,* Monsieur Varigny declared I continued the line of great dramatic

singers like Rose Caron, Lucienne Bréval and Felicia Litvinne.

In the United States I sang opera outside of New York, too, touring with the Metropolitan Company and singing also with those well-established companies in Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco.

I was kept incredibly busy with engagements that season. Once while singing Brünnhilde in St. Louis, I had to return to New York on the midnight train. As a rule this can be done quite comfortably, but on this occasion the mayor of St. Louis made one of the lengthiest speeches between the second and third acts that it has ever been my privilege to hear. I found myself at the end of the opera with only twenty minutes to make the train. I had no time to discard my flowing wig, the winged helmet, spear and shield that make up the Brünnhilde costume, but sallied forth in full regalia for the railroad station—to the complete astonishment of many passersby. To our own astonishment, the train was just pulling out of the station as we arrived, and we were obliged to hire a car and drive at top speed to the next stop—some twenty or thirty miles up the line. We made it just as the train pulled in, climbed aboard—I still in my Brünnhilde costume, clasping shield and spear—only to find we were in the wrong car. We had to walk through several other cars to reach the right one, to the consternation of our fellow travelers, one of whom called out, "It must be a holdup!"

Early in 1940, at St. Louis, I sang my first American *Carmen*. Later that year I repeated it with Jan Kiepura, then the darling of the movie-goers, though fellow artists and critics did not always care for his singing and acting, as my Don José. That *Carmen* and the other roles I did

with the Chicago Company at the time caused Herman Devries to write a most flattering notice of my work in the *Chicago Herald-American.* He said I "belonged to a class of artists who sang in another era when the Nordicas, the Fremstads and Lilli Lehmanns graced our stages."

Returning to Europe after my Metropolitan debut, I went to Geneva for my first lieder recital. The same year, 1936, with singers from the Paris Opéra, I participated in a season at the Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires, a theater whose incomparably high standards have received world recognition. There I added three roles to my rapidly expanding repertoire: Telaïre in Rameu's *Castor et Pollux,* Senta in *Flying Dutchman* and Kundry in *Parsifal.*

For some reason or other, and I am not going to attempt to put my finger on it, I seem to possess a flair for "naughty girl" roles—Salome, Ortrud, Carmen, Amneris—and I found Kundry, also in this category, very much to my liking. But this was another role which, like Isolde, Kirsten Flagstad had captured at the Metropolitan the year before I got there.

I went back to Buenos Aires for an even longer season in 1940, singing with conductors like Fritz Busch, Erich Kleiber and Ettore Panizza. Panizza, it will be remembered, conducted the *Salome* revival in which I appeared at the Metropolitan and we were together again when, in January, 1941, I sang the title role in the Metropolitan's first performance of Gluck's *Alceste.*

I ventured my first New York recital in January, 1938, singing a program at Town Hall which included songs of Brahms, Pfitzner, Franck and Duparc, as well as opera excerpts. The journey from the opera house to the recital hall is often long and hazardous for a singer, but I think I

accomplished it without mishap. Olin Downes wrote that he liked my "excellent sense of style and true feeling," and Jerome Bohm stated the recital was the most absorbing he had heard for five years. From then on recitals were an important and enjoyable part of my career and I experienced new delights in "discovering" songs and building my recital repertoire.

After I crossed the Atlantic for my first Metropolitan season I had few idle moments. By 1939 I had at least twenty-five major operatic roles in my repertoire and most of them I sang in two languages. These included: Brünnhilde in *The Ring* and her French counterpart in Reyer's *Sigurd,* Isolde, Brangaene, Salome, Kundry, Ortrud, Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser,* Tosca, Carmen, Thaïs, Telaïre, Salomé in *Hérodiade,* Keltis in *Vercingétorix,* Rachel, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni,* Lady Macbeth, Valentine, Aïda, Alceste and Santuzza.

But not even this list was enough. Entrepreneurs were forever suggesting I learn new roles for them. When I signed a contract to appear with the San Francisco Opera Company in 1940, I undertook to do a new role that season —Minnie, in an English version of Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West.* To my disappointment Lawrence Tibbett, who was to have sung the leading baritone role, became ill a few days before the first scheduled performance of *Girl of the Golden West* and the opera had to be struck from the repertoire. *Carmen,* with me in the title role, replaced it.

A season earlier I sang my first Sieglinde in San Francisco's gorgeous modern opera house and when I returned to the Metropolitan a few months later I sang the role there, too. My success in Sieglinde was a personal surprise.

Brünnhilde always had been so very much *my* role in *Walküre* that I never had concerned myself much with any other. If the San Francisco company had not asked me to sing Sieglinde for them in 1939 in all probability I never would have sung it, although I always appreciated the beauty and scope of Sieglinde's music. In any case New York audiences and critics liked me in the part.

Reviewing *The Ring* operas at the end of the season, Olin Downes wrote . . . *Marjorie Lawrence took the role of Sieglinde for the first time and this proved a singularly fortunate casting. She brought to her impersonation the spontaneity and abandon which made plausible Siegmund's apostrophe to the spring and the blossoming of the Walsung blood.*

Is it any wonder, then, that by the end of 1940 I was able to decide that the struggle had been worthwhile, that whatever the price I had paid to become a singer I was fully recompensed? Only eight years after my Monte Carlo debut, my career still at its dawning, I had been given my place among the great ones of my profession. The years ahead, abundant with promise, beckoned enticingly.

The war ended my transatlantic commuting between the Paris Opéra and the New York Metropolitan. Nevertheless, 1941 held recompensing delights. I was to sing my first Isolde at the Metropolitan and my engagement book was jam-packed with dates to sing with the finest orchestras and for recitals and opera appearances all over the American continent.

I awaited one 1941 engagement with particular interest. From an operatic point of view it was not without an experimental aspect and, moreover, it marked a signal honor bestowed upon me by a foreign government. There

was a reference to it in the *New York Times* of April 6, 1941. Under a headline, OPERA IN MEXICO, the *Times* stated:

> A national opera company has been formed in Mexico. It has been sponsored by the government and will open its first season in Mexico, D.F., on June 8. The season will be the first officially sponsored opera season in the country for thirty years. The company, known as the Mexican National Opera Company, has been set up as a separate department under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Most of the casts will be made up of Mexican singers but Marjorie Lawrence, of the Metropolitan, has been engaged to sing Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre,* and Salome and Carmen.

I did not realize how important—and tragic—this engagement was to be for me.

23. My Angel

IT WAS January 2, 1941 that my Angel entered my life. He walked in, in that calm, purposeful way of his, and took possession. This is how it happened.

At the time I was in the throes of a romance with a Russian prince. Never mind who he was; let us call him "Sergei." But he was an honest-to-goodness prince, intelligent, musical, and no gigolo. He had a job and worked at it diligently enough to earn himself a decent income. And he was as good-looking and charming as a prince has any right to be.

After having lived in Paris, the prosaic Anglo-Saxon male, especially the American genus of the species, had little romantic appeal for me. I was certain I would never marry one and often said so. I had been courted and proposed to by many men and in every language from high German to Brazilian Portuguese and had become accustomed to the pretty speeches and flowery eloquence of Europeans and Latin-Americans afflicted with the gentle passion.

By comparison, the love-making, at least in its verbal aspects, of Americans and Englishmen was rendered pale and lusterless. And pray, where is the woman of any race who does not appreciate having her graces, her beauty and her charms extolled by a man who claims to love her? I confess I never failed to find the experience pleasurable



New York Times Studio

As Venus in *Tannhäuser* with Lauritz Melchior, Metropolitan, 1942



Invincible Press

Sir Thomas Beecham and I with the cast from *Tristan and Isolde*, Montreal, 1943

even when I knew the panegyric was not entirely accurate or suspected the gentleman delivering it to be too glib to be true.

Prince Sergei suited my taste. He was a complete romantic. Every day he sent me flowers—sometimes to both the Ansonia and the Metropolitan. Invariably they were accompanied by an affectionate note. Sergei had a flair for the composition of these *billets-doux.* His stock of heart-fluttering phrases, all, to the best of my knowledge and experience original, was endless. Generally he began by addressing me as his "little princess." And, thoroughly normal woman that I am, the princess idea was not without its titillation.

Cyril, who had broken up my romance with Henri Grodet and had chased off many another suitor for my hand, smiled approval on Prince Sergei. My American manager, too, was all for the match, doubtless because he thought a "title" and incidental publicity would help my career. I had almost made up my mind to accept Sergei's next proposal of marriage when my Angel arrived on the scene.

There was no fanfare, no rumble from the drums to warn me of his approach. I had just finished singing Brünnhilde in *Walküre* at the Metropolitan and my dressing room was filled with friends, well-wishers and the usual pack whose predominant passion in life is to loiter on the fringes of artistic endeavor.

Being pleasant to people who descend upon you after an exacting performance is one of the more difficult obligations of an opera singer's career. I enjoy compliments and adulation as much as the next, but few people realize that

after a singer has finished her work she, like any other toiler, wants to relax and take it easy.

But to get back to my Angel. Out of the chattering throng about me he suddenly emerged, shook my hand, congratulated me and said, "My, but you must be tired. Why don't you sit down?" And reaching back through the crowd he dragged out a chair for me.

The thought flashed through my mind that here was an extraordinarily considerate young man, tall and handsome, too. I would have liked to go on talking with him, but in the melee there was no chance. A few nights later, however, after I had sung at one of Rafaelo Diaz' musicales at the Pierre Hotel, my wonderful friend Edmee Busch Greenough gave a party and I met him again. Edmee introduced us formally, saying, "Marjorie, I would like to present Dr. Thomas King."

We chatted briefly, too briefly for me to discover much about him, but his first letter to me came the same week. It was utterly different from Sergei's purple-prosed romantic outpourings, but further roused my interest in Thomas King. He wrote that he had seen me leaving the opera house the previous night after having sung Alceste. He had noticed that, although the night was cold and snow was falling, I had come out of the warm theater with my head uncovered. This, Dr. King presumed to state, was extremely foolish because it placed my health in jeopardy. A woman with sufficient intellect to memorize *The Ring* should have better sense.

His address was on the letter so I rang him up—not that I wished to pursue his acquaintance . . . good heavens, no . . . but I felt his impudence should not go unrebuked. But I learned it is extremely difficult to rebuke an Ameri-

can from the South. I attempted to castigate this presumptuous young man, but he replied to my opening tirade in his unruffled, even-measured drawl and, as I waited for him to round out his long, deliberate sentences, my annoyance evaporated.

The upshot of my phone call was that I accepted an invitation from him to go to a cocktail party a few nights later. We never got to that cocktail party, though. Tom called for me and we began talking. I liked his quiet assertiveness, his provocative ideas, his capacity for sober discussion, the manner in which he took it for granted that the male is boss. That first genuine tête-à-tête ended in my asking him to come with me a few nights later to see Grace Moore in the Metropolitan's revival of *L'Amore Dei Tre Rei.*

That night did it! Sergei was still sending his flowers and his love notes and seeing me quite often. But after my first night out with Tom King, Sergei was completely out of the race. After the opera we went to the Hotel Plaza for supper and dancing. I always loved to dance . . . and I mean dance. So many men take a girl out ostensibly to dance, but after a couple of whirls round the floor are disposed to spend the rest of the evening drinking and talking.

But not Tom King. When you went dancing with him you danced. And how he could dance! (I have used the past tense there because, ever since my illness prevented my dancing, my husband, entirely of his own volition, has not stepped on a dance floor.) But in those days of our early courtship we went dancing nearly every night. Many was the dawn when we closed up one of the old "Viennese" taverns out on Long Island, the sleepy waiters looking at

us, wondering if we would never go home and pondering on our tirelessness.

The lid was irrevocably blown off my romance with Sergei during a performance of *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan in which I sang Ortrud. Weeks before, while Sergei's stocks were at the peak of their boom, I had invited him to come to my dressing room during the third act of *Lohengrin.* He counted it a special privilege and whenever I sang Ortrud subsequently he always came and sat with me while I waited to make my brief final appearance at the end of the opera.

On the night of which I am writing, Sergei arrived as usual, preceded by a huge bouquet for his "princess." No sooner had he seated himself than there was a tap on the door and in strode Tom. Smilingly phlegmatic as usual, he very possessively kissed my cheek and shook hands with Sergei. Sergei was beside himself. His eyes narrowed to two steely points of light. Spots of high color glowed on his cheeks. That another man should visit me at a time he believed sacrosanct to him was outrage enough, but that the interloper should presume to kiss me. . . !

If Tom King had any idea of the fire of resentment he had set ablaze (and I am positive he did), he gave no hint. He did not even laugh, as I so nearly did, when Sergei made a sudden dramatic exit, but bade him good-by with good-natured formality. He did it so perfectly I nearly kissed him there and then. Instead I patted his shoulder, told him to wait and went on to the stage to finish the opera.

Whether or not all the behind-the-scenes excitement had anything to do with it or not, I cannot say, but my Ortrud that night was one of my best. It prompted

"G.C.L.," critic for Chicago's musical Bible, the *Musical Leader,* to write: . . . *Madam Flagstad and Mr. Melchior repeated their well-known impersonations of Elsa and the Swan Knight, with Mr. Janssen as Telramund. However, the main interest in the performance centered in the exceptionally convincing Ortrud of Marjorie Lawrence.* . . .

But for me that night the show was not *the* thing, not by a long chalk. Tom took me to supper and again we danced, beginning an ecstatic courtship that culminated in our marriage two months later. We went to theaters, to the opera. We talked a lot and argued about everything. And what a relief it always was to my jangled nerves to see my placid American after being with the high-strung and emotional personalities of which every opera house has its quota. He often brought to my mind a favorite quotation of mine: "There is an art in muting the strings as well as plucking them."

Unlike many Americans who regard walking as a chore and an activity indulged in only by people too poor to own an automobile, Tom enjoys a walk. Riverside Drive was our Lovers' Lane. Frequently after I had sung at the opera, we tramped our way along the Hudson, over the snow, sometimes going up nearly as far as the George Washington Bridge. We were in that blissful state vouchsafed to humans only when they are head over heels in love with someone and are positive that the cause of the dither is identically affected. The cold, the distances we trudged were unnoticed. Our love kept us warm and put wings on our feet.

One night when the ground was covered with a blanket of crisp, freshly fallen snow, Tom, to my amazement, flung

himself down on it and began beating about with his arms and legs. When he stood up he had left an impression in the snow which, to sufficiently imaginative minds, strongly resembled an angel in full flight. I have seen youngsters perform this stunt since and know now that it has been favored by young Americans for generations. But Tom's was the first performance I ever saw of the angel "act" and I have called him "Angel" ever since. It may sound sentimental, but why not?

But the course of our true love was not entirely smooth. A psychologist might have ironed out the first twist had I given one the chance. The cause of it was one of Tom King's characteristics that originally had provoked my admiration and respect—his rigid adherence to the principle that the man is boss. Not remarkably, what I had admired at a casual meeting became difficult for me to take on a day-to-day basis. After all, for years I had been accustomed to my friends and suitors regarding my slightest whim as a command. And now this American was telling me what to do and questioning my judgment.

I had been deluded, I told myself. What I had mistaken for dignity and strength of character was nothing more than Irish stubbornness. But I would show him. Wait until we were married. (Oh, yes, despite his stubbornness, I wanted to marry him.) I would show him then who was boss.

Our most serious arguments were over money. Tom had outlined his own financial situation to me. He had no income outside what he earned from his practice. This was not large. But he was becoming established and possessed that typical American confidence that because he knew his job and worked hard at it, his ultimate financial

security was assured. The average young woman contemplating marriage with Tom King need have no fear about his financial soundness. The rub was: I was not an average young woman.

I fired the first shot in our financial conflict, and quite unconsciously, when I told him I would expect my husband to forsake whatever work he was doing and be my companion in the gypsy existence that is the professional singer's life.

"In that case," he said, "you will have to rule me out as a prospective husband. I am not going to be any Mister Lawrence! Besides, I have my own career and it keeps me here in New York."

"That's too bad, isn't it?" I said, in what was intended to be a semihumorous way. "And just as we were getting along so well together, too."

"Yes," said Tom, far from humorous, "it's just too bad."

We did not go on with the discussion then but returned to it many times subsequently, more than once threatening to damage irreparably the fine fabric of our romance. I thought we had torn it to shreds the night I declared, during what had begun as a lovers' tête-à-tête in my suite at the Ansonia, that my earnings and investments would be sufficient to provide for both of us after we had married.

Like most self-made people, contemplation of the money I had earned and what it would buy me did give me some pleasure. Completely disregarding the effect my words might have on Tom, I gave him facts and figures. I had made so many thousand dollars from this opera season; my fee for that broadcast had been such-and-such; my investments in a certain stock had brought me in so much

last year; my deposits in this or that bank now totaled this figure.

"So you see, darling," I rounded off, "we have plenty of money. After we are married we could live on here at the Ansonia or take a bigger apartment uptown somewhere. Or we could buy or rent a house out on Long Island. I could afford to have enough servants to give us just as much comfort as I am getting in this hotel."

"No," he shook his head. "That would never do. We would have to try to get along on what I earn."

"It will have to do," I shouted. "There is no other way."

"Oh yes, there is," he said. And getting up from his chair he walked out of the place, without even a good-by.

I was dumbfounded. I wanted to shout to him to come back. But I could not. I just sat there, my hand over my mouth, unable to believe my ears. I had offered this man everything I had and everything I was. And he, the stupid, ungrateful fool, had walked out on me. No man had ever done that before. I was angry, hurt and humiliated.

I did not see him or hear from him for one whole ghastly week. Fortunately I had no engagements at the Metropolitan and I sat around like Jacob bewailing his son and "refused to be comforted." I could not sleep. I could not eat. Twenty times a day I rushed to the telephone when it rang, hoping my stiff-necked lover had relented. By the end of the week I was quite ill. Friends persuaded Tom to come to see me.

I gathered some quaint consolation when I beheld him. I was not the only one who had experienced a far from happy week. This realization did not bode well for the evening ahead. I began to play the gay prima donna. Instead of throwing myself into his arms and telling him that we

would have to solve our differences somehow because neither of us could live without the other, I invented small talk about where I had been and the gay times I had been having.

Tom took it for a while and then blew up. The young Southern gentleman was transformed into a fury before my eyes. He saw a bouquet of red roses in a corner of the room. Presuming erroneously that they had come from Prince Sergei, he muttered dire threats about what he was going to do to him and hurled the flowers out of the window onto the passing Broadway crowds below. Striding about the room, gesticulating madly, he thumped tables, overturned furniture and yelled and shouted at me. Most of his ranting was incoherent but the words "lap dog" and "Mister Lawrence" emerged frequently from the verbal torrent.

I listened patiently, sympathetically, understandingly . . . for the first few minutes. But as his anger grew, as he continued to curse the fate that had caused him to fall in love with an affluent woman, my own overwrought nerves snapped, too. I began to shout back and then the fracas really did begin. Semiconsciously I thanked God for the Ansonia's soundproof walls as we played out a scene that for tantrums, hysteria and destructiveness outdid anything that ever happened in *Private Lives* even with Tallulah Bankhead and Donald Cook in it.

About midnight I was exhausted. With a final burst of vituperation I collapsed on a divan. Tom had had enough, too, and flung himself down beside me. I began to cry. He tried to kiss away my tears and burst into sobs himself. From tears we went to laughter . . . then back to tears. Slowly our jangled nerves relaxed and we talked until

dawn. We agreed that anything was preferable to our being apart; that we would marry as soon as possible; that we would come to some arrangement over who would pay for what.

He still was adamant about not traveling with me . . . although he did give a little ground on this. Thank God he did! He agreed to regard my engagement with the Mexican National Opera Company as a honeymoon and said he would arrange to go to Mexico with me.

Outside our own differences of opinion, my brother Cyril was the biggest stumbling block on our road to wedded bliss. Cyril's love for me always had gone beyond the usual bounds of brotherly affection. He was utterly devoted to me and my work and, I know, genuinely concerned lest I come to any hurt. Probably because deep down, I suspect, Cyril is a bit of a snob, he might have given me up to Prince Sergei . . . but not to Tom King.

"Cyril," I told him so many times, "this is the real thing. I know . . . every woman does . . . when the right man comes along."

"The right man," he snorted. "How do you know he's the right man? How do you know who he is . . . what he is? I know what he is: he's a dollar-chaser. Yes, a dollar-chaser. He's looking for a meal ticket and you look a soft touch."

For weeks this kind of thing went on. It upset me because I have always had a deep affection for Cyril. He had been such a noble ally in the whole adventure of my becoming a singer. I wanted him to share my happiness in discovering a man with whom, I was sure, I would be happy always and forever. To me marriage was a very serious business. I did not want mine to be any fly-by-night

affair. Many times I had contemplated marriage but always, previously, the fear it might not last deterred me. This time I had no qualms. I knew Tom King would keep his vow to love and cherish me "for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health" until death parted us.

How right I was!

If only I could have made Cyril understand how I felt, it would have saved each of us so much unhappiness. But it was no good. Although we were in midseason at the Metropolitan, and it was by far my busiest and most successful season at the opera house, Cyril urged me to go away for a trip.

"Get away from this fellow and New York for a few weeks," he said, "and you'll forget all about him."

"Cyril, Cyril," I begged, "don't be silly! I never will forget him. I don't want to forget him."

"You'd better forget him," he thundered back. "If you don't, I'll have him bumped off."

That little speech of Cyril's blasted my last remaining hope of having the kind of wedding most girls dream about: a church ceremony embellished with every piece of pageantry the Christian mind has devised for such occasions, a choir singing and an organ pealing, with every friend along to see it all and a great banquet to follow. As a dyed-in-the-wool one-wedding girl I wanted that wedding to be complete.

I realized when Cyril threatened to have Tom "bumped off" he was speaking with an extravagance engendered by the emotional stress that possessed him. But I was fearful of what my brother might be impelled to do. Short of murder, I felt him capable of going to any extreme to prevent my marrying Tom. Therefore, abandoning my

dream wedding, I told Tom our marriage would have to be utterly simple and planned with the utmost secrecy.

The Metropolitan season ended on March 22nd. This was the night when I sang Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung* and Grane persisted with that strange whinnying during the last act. We decided we would marry one week later, March 29th.

There were times when I doubted whether we could complete arrangements in time. One morning slipped by while we went to City Hall and obtained our license. Then there was a dash out to Brooklyn to ask Dr. Stanley Durkee, a friend of Tom's and pastor of the lovely old Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, to perform the marriage ceremony. And we gave my then New York manager and Betty Bee, the gifted dressmaker who looked after my clothes with such devotion, the surprise of their lives by asking them to be our witnesses.

I spent my wedding eve giving a concert in New York with John Barbirolli. Tom collected me when it was over. With our marriage plans complete and Dr. Durkee scheduled to pronounce us man and wife within a dozen hours, he was taking no risks of Cyril trying to kidnap me. We raced to the Ansonia and I packed a bag. I left a note for Cyril giving him the time and place of the wedding and asking him to show up. Then we drove out to the Towers Hotel in Brooklyn Heights where Tom had engaged a suite for me in the name of "Tilly Meyers," an alias of my own choosing. He saw me safely ensconced and told me not to leave the hotel until he called for me next morning.

The majestic strains of the Lohengrin wedding march reverberated throughout the starkly empty church when our little wedding party gathered at its door next morn-

ing. We were about to enter when a taxi screeched to a stop at the curb. Cyril leaped from it and bounded towards us. Momentarily I feared a last-minute attempt to stop us, but Cyril, with a sad little grin on his face, shook Tom's hand, kissed me and wished us luck. I let out a long sigh of relief and marched down the aisle.

To our harassed minds the ceremony, beautiful as it was, seemed endless, but finally it was over. The knot was well and truly tied, binding me to the man I loved. Arm in arm we walked back down the aisle and out of the church to be met by a barrage of exploding flash bulbs as photographers from every newspaper in New York and Brooklyn, assembled by a church secretary with a keen publicity sense, went to work. In the midst of the confusion Tom remembered he had not arranged for a car to take us back to the hotel. But the sun was shining, it was a lovely day, the hotel was only a few blocks away and we decided to walk.

Nursing my wedding bouquet in one arm and hanging onto my husband with the other, we went down the street, with the fellows from the newspapers, now joined by a steadily growing crowd, shouting out greetings to us and continuing to let fly with their flash bulbs. Our wedding luncheon was not quite ready when we got back to the hotel, but the champagne was and we let it flow. It was one of the few occasions on which I have appreciated alcohol's balmy effects in time of stress.

In all the rush and excitement we had not made specific plans for spending the days immediately after our marriage. There had been vague talk about getting the car and driving up to Connecticut and putting up at some lovely old inn there. And so, happy with relief that our

marriage had gone off without a hitch, the lovelight doubtless gleaming in our eyes and champagne bubbles beating a gentle tattoo on our brains, we left the hotel towards midafternoon and headed north.

Semi-intoxicated with the happiness that flooded our hearts and minds, we drove for a couple of hours without taking very much notice of the countryside gliding by. Slowly I emerged from the fog to notice there were no welcoming lights in any of the inns we passed. They were closed up tight. But we kept on driving. Dinner time came and went but we had found no haven and the moon was high in the heavens before the fact penetrated our minds that the inns, closed for the winter, would not reopen until the spring.

There was nothing for it but to turn about and drive back to New York. About midnight, cold, hungry, but still very, very happy, we checked in at an obscure old-fashioned hotel in uptown Manhattan. We would have gone to a more fashionable place but as we stopped by a newsstand we could see our wedding photographs emblazoned on the front pages of some of the newspapers. There would be no privacy for us in the smarter downtown hotels that night and we would have been recognized directly we attempted to check in. So, perforce, we made do with our uptown hideaway until next day when we took a house out on Long Island and moved into it.

If any other part of my wedding had not come up to the dream standards I had fixed, my honeymoon did. Our house was right on the beach. The gentle surf sang us to sleep at nights and in the mornings the sea mist swept through our open windows. We defied the cold and swam nearly every day. Tom hired a couple of bikes

and we rode them all over the countryside. Other days we forsook our bikes and walked for miles along the hard, pebbly beach.

Never had I been so happy. Vainly I searched my mind to discover what more I could expect from life. I had my wonderful husband. My career was surging on to the topmost levels of vocal achievement. And because I was young, strong and healthy, I derived the last ounce of joy and satisfaction from every pleasurable experience and triumph that came my way. Yes, it was more than good to be alive. It was very heaven!

24. Mexico City

WE HAD been in Mexico City only a couple of days when I began to suffer most severe headaches and pains in my back. When these first manifested themselves, I attributed them to the excitement of preparing for the new company's season, took a couple of aspirins and confidently expected them to vanish. Then, as the pains persisted, we told people at the opera house and they completely reassured us.

"Oh, that's nothing to worry over," they said. "It's the altitude. Everyone who comes here has headaches the first few days."

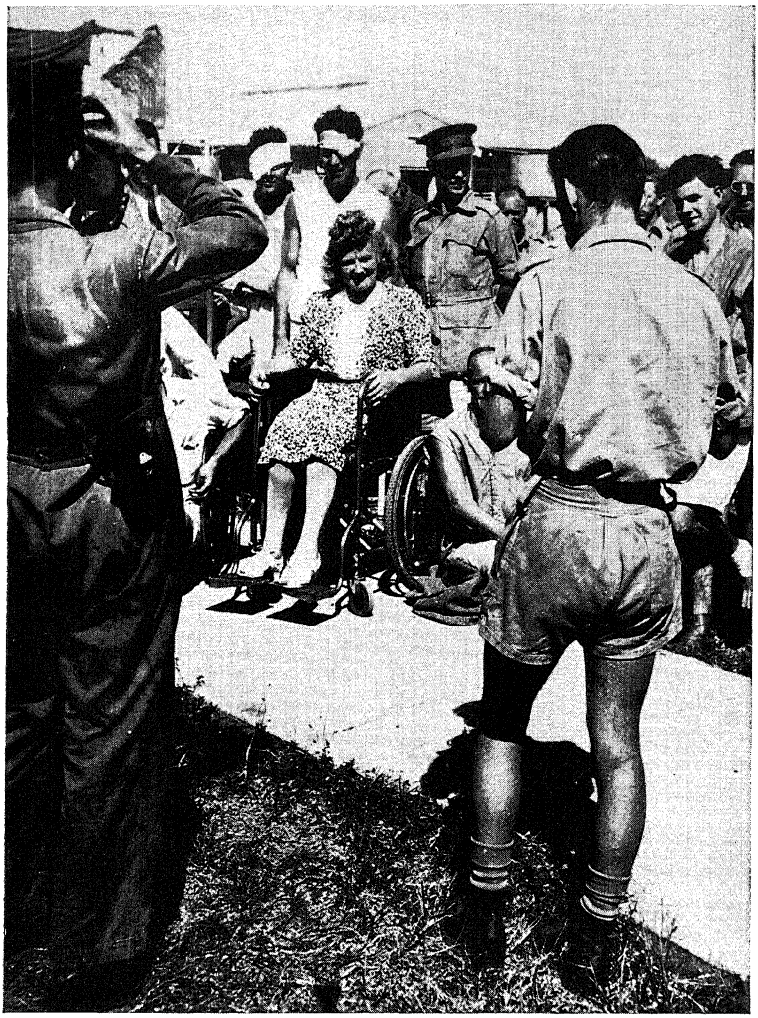
I did not need to be told not to worry. My health, I knew, was perfect. It always had been. But the headaches were annoying and the night before the opera was billed to open at the Palacio de Bellas Artes I was ready to admit I was as sick as I had ever been. Not that it occurred to me that there was anything more the matter with me than the depression produced by the infernal headaches and pains. We were opening with *Walküre*—I singing Brünnhilde—and, as is the practice in most Latin-American countries, a general rehearsal had been called for the night prior to the opening.

I was very dejected as we left the hotel, but once I arrived at the theater I regained some of my normal good spirits. The place was a bedlam. Everyone was in a dither



Invincible Press

At the White House for the President's birthday luncheon, 1943, with Mrs. Roosevelt, Dennis Morgan, Roy Rogers and Loretta Young



Invincible Press

After a concert for hospitalized troops in the Southwest Pacific

over the opening and within a few minutes I was dragged into the frenzy. While I put on my costume and prepared to go onto the stage, I could hear the opening act of the opera going on in the theater and almost forgot I had a headache. Once I began to sing, though, the pain reasserted itself with redoubled violence.

Had a dozen demons been driving red-hot spikes through my skull they could not have caused me more severe torture than I experienced when I sang the first "Ho-jo-to-ho" of the Battle Cry. I will never know how I sang the second top *C*'s. The pain was so excruciating I staggered forward and was forced to lean on my shield and spear for support while I recovered possession of my senses. Shafts of pain shot to all parts of my body, temporarily taking the sight from my eyes and constricting my throat. I tottered and feared I would collapse. Somehow I rallied my wits sufficiently to get through the aria. I kept on singing in much the same way a boxer must continue slugging after taking a stupifying blow. I knew and loved the music so well and had sung it so many times, I was able almost automatically to continue with my part. Not even the pain that assailed me could distract my mind and voice from continuing.

But I was in torment when I returned to the stage for the duet with Wotan halfway through the act.

"*Vater, Vater, sag was ist Dir . . .*" I sang, kneeling before him.

That was the end.

I tried to rise and was horrified to find I could not. My right knee wobbled grotesquely when I tried to put my weight on it. I gaped at it, incredulous that it would not obey the prompting of my mind. The orchestra stuttered

to silence. A spasm of pain wracked my body. Flesh and blood could not endure it. I collapsed, my last flickerings of consciousness registering the startled cries that came from the theater and the wings.

When I recovered sufficiently to appreciate something of what was going on, I was still lying on the stage, Tom looking down at me with anxious fear-filled eyes. My colleagues stood about, shocked and frightened. I was still suffering agonies and was terrified to find that I could not move my legs. The rehearsal was called off. Still in my costume I was carried out of the theater, put in a car and driven back to our hotel.

A doctor on the staff of the opera house arrived soon after. I was but dimly aware of his presence or examination and did not hear him pronounce his diagnosis as "neuritis or possibly poliomyelitis." As the night progressed my condition worsened. I vomited incessantly and every part of my body ached. Tom was frantic. He tried all over Mexico City to get a specialist, a neurologist, to come and examine me. The best he could do was to elicit a vague promise from the wife of one that he would call next day. She was appalled anyone should imagine so distinguished a consultant as her husband would make a visit at night. The Hippocratic Oath, I fear, is not overzealously observed by some of Mexico's medical men.

I shall never be able to tell what I went through that night. A searing fever possessed me. In a delirium I imagined the twelve apostles of Christ had arrayed themselves about my bed. They were waiting for me to get up and accompany them on a journey. By all the laws governing human existence I should have died then, and possibly my apostolic imaginings can be linked to my subconscious

mind's acceptance of that fact. In the few conscious moments I experienced, I would have welcomed death; better death than unrelenting agony.

A specialist came next day. He prodded and probed, looked wise, hemmed and hawed as doctors are wont to do when baffled. Then, declaring me to be suffering from "inflammation of the nerves," he ordered me to the American Hospital for further tests. The fearful pains continued, relief from them coming only when I blacked out completely.

Karl Alwin and the other people from the opera were in and out of the hospital hoping I would recover from the "mysterious disease" as suddenly as I had been stricken. The opera opening was postponed two weeks in the hope that I would. But while the worried opera executives beat their heads with anxiety and the local doctors thoughtfully tapped their chins, paralysis slowly, inexorably claimed my entire body. By the end of the first day I was affected from shoulder to toes. It was then decided by the majority of my medicos that what my husband had feared from the outset was true: I was a victim of poliomyelitis. On my husband's insistence the verdict was kept from me.

The Mexican doctors were extremely kind but confessed they could do little or nothing for me, apart from prescribing a diathermy treatment. When Tom saw this treatment was completely futile, he insisted on taking me back to the United States . . . first to the world-famous waters at Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he knew the hot waters would at least alleviate my terrible pain. His problem was how to get me there. My back was completely

paralyzed and the slightest movement of my body caused me pain such as I never before had experienced.

Fortunately for us, that distinguished American diplomat and writer, the late Josephus Daniels, was United States Ambassador in Mexico City. He was our friend indeed. Mr. Daniels had issued invitations to a reception for me at the Embassy, but instead of being my host at a colorful party, he immediately rallied to our aid to get me back to the United States. Space on planes flying between Mexico City and the United States was at a premium, but the Embassy staff persuaded an airlines company to rip out four seats from one of its ships and make sufficient room for me to be placed inside it on a stretcher. The plane, it was arranged, would take us as far as Brownsville, Texas, whence we would have to make our way to Hot Springs.

My mind almost unhinged by pain and the partial realization of what had happened to me, the prospect of the long journey was terrifying. I was prepared to give up the ghost. I begged Tom to let me remain where I was. I was going to die. Why inflict new tortures upon me? My poor husband was not far from the end of his own tether, but with superhuman patience and gentleness he told me that once we got to Hot Springs something would be done to ease my suffering . . . there were facilities there, too, for treatment that would put me back on my feet. Didn't I want to be fit for the Metropolitan season? What about that Isolde I was going to sing?

So one morning they carried me out of the American Hospital and loaded me into an ambulance that drove us to the airfield. The story of my illness was big news

in Mexico City and, although I was far from being in full possession of my faculties, as I was carried into the sunlight I glimpsed the crowd of sympathetic people gathered to see my departure. They had read in their papers that hopes for my quick recovery had been abandoned and that Rose Pauly was coming to Mexico City to sing Salome and Carmen for them and Dorothee Manski to do Brünnhilde.

I am not going to try to describe that long flight to Brownsville, but every time I emerged to near-consciousness Tom was beside me to utter a word of comfort and reassure me that we were "nearly there." When finally we did get to Brownsville, I was taken from the plane to the Catholic Hospital and I shall forever remember the kindness of the Sisters there who cared for me while plans for the rest of our journey were made.

Without a Josephus Daniels to plead our case, we were unable to persuade an airline to fly us to Hot Springs and there was nothing for it but to essay the journey by train. Again my courage deserted me. Again I begged to be left where I was. But again, too, Tom rallied my waning spirits and we set off. I think it took that train three days to get to Hot Springs, but it seemed an eternity. The train crew had been told I was aboard and it is improbable that the Missouri Pacific ever gave its passengers such a jolt-free ride as they enjoyed that time. The enginemen glided the locomotive into every stop and eased it off on every start with amazing smoothness. Even so, my unhappy body was in such a state that it was never free from torment. I cursed my moments of awareness and yearned for the merciful fog of unconsciousness to envelop me.

The train we were on did not go right into Hot Springs, which is situated on a branch line, and we had to leave it at Benton and cover the rest of the journey to Saint Joseph's Hospital, a mere twenty-five miles, by ambulance. Before we had gone five miles, both Tom and I passed out; I because I was overcome by pain, and my husband because he was completely exhausted from the shock and strain of the terrible events that had so tragically interrupted our honeymoon. Doctor George B. Fletcher took charge of me at the hospital and, after I had rested for a couple of days, the treatments began. I was still completely paralyzed and every day I was rolled from my bed into a bathtub full of hot mineral water. The baths in the radioactive water brought immediate relief and the fearful pains which had beset me gradually lessened.

For three weeks this treatment continued and as my condition improved I graduated from the bedside bathtub to a large therapeutic pool in the Maurice Bathhouse, whence I was taken daily by ambulance. I was grateful for the relief the water treatment brought, but as the tide of pain ebbed, my mind began to comprehend the full scope of my tragedy. Would I ever walk again, I asked myself. Would the paralysis affect my voice? Was my career at an end? Even worse—was I condemned to spend the rest of my life in a hospital bed? Terror and foreboding overpowered me and I wept for hours every day.

There had been some medical speculation that my paralysis was caused by a smallpox vaccination that it had been necessary for me to take before crossing the Mexican border. But Doctor Fletcher confirmed the diagnosis that I was a poliomyelitis victim and that my case was an

exceptionally severe one. Incidentally, this diagnosis was the consensus of opinion by leading specialists we consulted throughout the United States as well as in England, France, Australia and other countries to which our travels later took us. Most certainly, too, if we had had any doubts on the matter I never would have submitted to further vaccinations which were prerequisite for my troop-concert tours of the Southwest Pacific and Europe.

Not until Doctor Fletcher had stated his opinion of my case did my husband permit me to be told that I had poliomyelitis. I leave my readers to imagine how the information affected me. My depression was accentuated by the hospital atmosphere in which I lived; the constant handling as though I were an inanimate mass; being cooped-up in one room; knowing there were sick and suffering people all about me. The nuns at Saint Joseph's were the soul of goodness, consideration and efficiency, but I was forced to tell Tom that if he did not get me away from the hospital and quickly, I would go mad.

Forthwith he began what is my nomination for the most difficult house-hunt in this house-hunting age. The object of his search had to be situated not too far from the Bathhouse where my daily visits were to continue; it had to be as free as possible of steps and stairs; and it had to be bright and sunny. I insisted on that. It was the ambulance driver who drove me from Saint Joseph's to the Bathhouse who discovered what we were after. One day after a treatment he took us to see it. We fell in love with what we saw at first sight and have remained faithful to that love ever since.

Twelve miles out from Hot Springs along the Arkadelphia Highway the driver swung the ambulance into a

flower-lined driveway and followed it up to a large stone house. So perfectly did that house fit into the surrounding landscape it might have been created with the wooded rocky hills about it. Two streams tumbled down from the hills and sang their way through the property. And down below the house two small lakes surrounded by willows and pines glistened in the afternoon sunlight.

This place, which we later named Harmony Hills Ranch, belonged to Mrs. Mary Hedrick, widow of Ira Hedrick, a contractor and engineer who had planned and built bridges, highways and other public works all over the United States. Ira Hedrick labored competently and well for the American people, and at Harmony Hills on these five hundred sprawling acres he had built his own dream house. After his death Mrs. Hedrick kept up the house with loving care, but its eighteen rooms were too much for her and, so the ambulance driver told us, she was offering a five-room apartment for rent. We took it on the spot and moved in next day.

Before we left in the late fall that year we were completely enamored with the property. So much so, that not long afterwards when Mrs. Hedrick offered to sell it to us we bought it. The purchase severely strained our bank balance and there have been occasions when we feared we would not be able to meet our commitments on it. Providentially something always has turned up to enable us to do so. Now that Harmony Hills belongs to us, we do not begrudge one cent of what it cost us. Whenever we are tired, whenever the way has been hard, as it inevitably is at times in this rugged modern existence, we come back to Harmony Hills and are refreshed in body and spirit. After long concert tours we rush to the

ranch because here, in these quiet hills where one feels so very close to God, we have discovered the real joys of living.

Directly we moved from Saint Joseph's to Harmony Hills my morale improved. Part of every day I spent out of doors in the sunshine. And I know no Australian, young or old, robust or feeble, who is not the better off for a few hours in the sun. Helpless though I was and unable to move, I felt a little pleasure again as I lay on a stretcher in the warmth and color of Mrs. Hedrick's flower-filled garden.

Every day, too, the ambulance took me to the Bath-house where my treatments continued. Gradually these drove away completely the pains which had dogged me from the moment I was stricken in Mexico City, but only very slowly did they seem to free any part of my body from the paralysis holding it in its grip. Fear again possessed me. My mind could not entertain the idea that I was to be paralyzed permanently. That was unthinkable. Surely there was something, some treatment that would, partially at least, restore the power of movement to my limbs.

One night when everyone else at Harmony Hills had gone to sleep, I weepingly confessed my worries to Tom. Although he was always cautious not to convey his own misgivings to me, he admitted he was as disturbed and disappointed as I that there had been so little improvement in my condition. We had both heard of my fellow Australian Sister Elizabeth Kenny who, winning her first battles over medical prejudice and skepticism, was achieving extraordinary results in the remedial treatment of poliomyelitis at the Minneapolis University Hospital.

Before the night was out, Tom had written to Sister Kenny telling her of my case and asking if she could do anything for me.

By immediate telegram, she bade us hasten to Minneapolis.

25. Sister Kenny

MINUTES BEFORE I saw her, I heard and "felt" Elizabeth Kenny. She was there on the platform when they unloaded me from the train at Minneapolis. Before I could turn my head into position to see her, I heard her snapping instructions for placing me in the ambulance and, as I have said, I could positively "feel" the strength of authority that she exudes. Only when I was stowed aboard the ambulance in the manner she directed, did she relax sufficiently to greet us. Sick as I was, I could not but be impressed by the famous nurse. Here was a woman who knew where she wanted to go in life and had very positive ideas about getting there. I hasten to add it required only the briefest acquaintance with her to detect a blend of warm humanity in her make-up—a not unexpected attribute in one whose life is dedicated to crusading against suffering and affliction.

But it was the rugged, starkly honest side of Sister Kenny that was first displayed to Tom and me. I was no sooner in bed at the hospital than she told us that the full success of her "method" depended very largely on her being able to treat a patient as soon as possible after infection. More than two months had elapsed since I had been stricken. She admitted the odds were against us, but said she would do her utmost to help me.

We anticipated a degree of unorthodoxy in her method,

but I was far from prepared for the things that happened to me during the examination Sister Kenny made almost directly she had me inside the hospital. Following me into the room allotted to me, she stripped off her coat and went to work. She laid me face downwards on the bed and grasping me by either ankle bent back my legs as far as they would go. Then she rolled me over and endeavored to push my legs up and over until my big toes nearly touched my forehead. Other parts of my body were subjected to similar stretching and pulling, but I was not fully aware of them. Elizabeth Kenny had frightened the wits out of me . . . literally.

At Mexico City and Hot Springs I had been handled as though I would fall apart if any of my limbs were permitted to deviate to any extent from the rigidity in which the paralysis held them. Doctors and nurses were forever cautious not to "stretch" my muscles. But not Elizabeth Kenny. After she had finished with me, I lay on my bed unable even to speak, my only comforting thought being, Well, if she doesn't kill me in the process she might cure me! To my profound relief the actual Kenny treatment proved a much gentler process than the examination to which its originator had subjected me. The soothing Kenny hot-packs were applied daily to my back and limbs and Sister Kenny and her operatives coaxed my muscles back to work. Almost imperceptibly my body flickered back to life: today I twitched a toe, tomorrow I lifted a shoulder ever so slight a distance from the bed.

Throughout the first month at Minneapolis I was completely preoccupied with the Kenny Method and its results. But, as the weeks sped by and the opening date

for the Metropolitan's season drew near, I was overcome with melancholy. Kirsten Flagstad had made her notorious exit from the United States to join her husband in occupied Norway. My bedside table was stacked with frantic telegrams from the opera house: When would I be coming back to New York? Would I be prepared to begin my season as Isolde? How many Brünnhildes, Sieglindes, Salomes would I like to sing?

It was in these days that I abandoned hope of quick, complete recovery. Until then I had been able to convince myself that it would be a matter of only a few months before I would be back on my feet. I had never been ill. I was healthy, young and strong, I told myself, and could throw off this ghastly thing that had attacked me. The idea of my being a lifelong invalid was preposterous, unthinkable. A career like mine could not be stopped in mid-flight. Other people might go down and stay down to infantile paralysis but not me—not Marjorie Lawrence.

But when I looked at the telegrams from the Metropolitan, I knew. When, they asked, would I be coming back? Yes . . . when? I asked myself the question . . . when? I tried to move my leaden limbs. There was the answer. I would not be going back this coming season. Those dead legs do the Salome dance! That awkward arm flaunt Brünnhilde's shield! Those awkward fingers click Carmen's castanets! *This* body lure a Tristan or a Scarpia! No . . . I would not be going back to the Metropolitan this season. Then if not this season, when? When again would I stride triumphantly onto a stage, when again revel in the power of holding an audience in my grasp, when again send my voice ringing round an opera house and hear the sweet music of the crowd's applause?

Could the answer be—never? Was this the end? Had all the labor I had put into becoming a singer, all the miseries, disappointments, hardships, been endured for this? Was the cup of achievement to be snatched from my grasp when I had taken only the first sips of its precious contents?

And again the tedium of hospitalization distressed me. During my first days at Minneapolis I derived a quaint pleasure from being the hospital's exhibit A. I suppose a prima donna enjoys holding the center of the stage even if the stage is a hospital. But very quickly I came to shudder every time I heard myself referred to as "a very bad case" or "one of the worst cases we have ever had." I lost faith in Sister Kenny. I wept incessantly. Hour after hour I lay motionless, brooding, torturing myself by recalling what I had been and contemplating what I had become. I would not, could not, talk—not even to Tom. My defenses were down. Despair took possession of me.

Tom knew without my telling him that it would be hazardous to let me remain in the hospital. If I were to recover the will to fight for my health I would have to get to other surroundings. He talked to Sister Kenny about moving me and she suggested we take an apartment in the building in which she lived. She agreed it would be more pleasant for me there and the treatments could continue under her guidance. We had grown to love and admire her so much that this arrangement suited us perfectly. Tom had been studying the Kenny Method at the hospital under her supervision and by this time knew enough about it to administer the hot-packs and put me through the muscular re-education drills.

I was glad to get into the apartment, but there was no

immediate improvement in my mental outlook. I was haunted by a desire to sing the Isolde music and, although it caused me a pang every time I saw it, I kept a score of *Tristan* near my bed. The music was forever running through my mind and often when my husband was at the hospital and the maid was out of the way, I would try to sing parts of it. There came a day when I no longer could curb the impulse to sing: I had to sing, at least to try to sing. I *had* to know whether I still had a voice.

"Tom," I told my husband when he came home from the hospital that afternoon, "you must get me a piano. I am going to try to sing again."

He stared at me in amazement. I could see that his usual calm was jolted.

"What did you say you wanted?" he asked.

"A piano," I said. "I am going to try to sing."

"A piano! Well, if you are sure that's what you want, I will see what I can do about getting you one."

Within twenty-four hours he had an old upright installed in the living room. I was still unable to sit up unless well and truly propped in position. Tom put some cushions in a big chair and hoisted me on top of them in an almost-sitting position. He put a strap around my middle—and around the chair—to support my back and another around my shoulders. Then, to give me further support, he strapped my legs to those of the chair. Trussed so, I was pushed over to the piano, my cherished score of *Tristan* in my hands.

I set up the score on the piano and began to sing the music from the first act. Instinctively I attempted to take those big, quick gulps of breath a singer must, but I was unable to do so. The paralysis had left its mark even upon

the muscles of my diaphragm and chest. But I was able to get enough air into my lungs to sing and to satisfy myself my voice was still there: only a shadow of what it had been, true, but substantial enough to encourage me to hope that one day I would sing again.

I was able to use my voice for only five or six minutes at the first attempt, but I was back at the piano next day and every day thereafter. As the muscles of my back and chest strengthened, I sang for longer periods and my voice gained power and steadiness. While I was singing I forgot my illness and the sanity-destroying depression left me. But misery and hopelessness inhabited my every other waking hour. Friends who visited me did not help dispel this doleful pair. Most of them could not disguise their horror at seeing how the disease had affected me and invariably exclaimed something like, "And to think, my dear, that this should happen to *you!*"

Thank God my husband was no Job's comforter. Because during all our tribulations he had never failed me, because I knew his love for me was as strong as ever, I was able to unburden myself to him and, by doing so, bring into the light the whole blighting array of terrors that beset me.

"What will I do, Tom? What will I do?" I asked him.

Without dramatics, without the slightest hint of preachiness, he replied with that steadfast look of strength and devotion I had come to know so well, "Everyone does seem to think your case is hopeless. But there is a God. Let us turn to Him and have faith. I know He will help."

Neither my husband nor myself are what would be described as "religious," but he had been brought up a Methodist and I already have written about the way my

father took us regularly to the Church of England. Our youthful religious training and the firm faith in God which that training had instilled in our minds and hearts became the staff that supported us in this, our darkest hour. We set aside a part of every day to reading the Bible and found comfort and solace in its all-wise words. It seemed, as I listened to Tom reading them, that there were parts of the Scriptures written especially for me: a divine prescription for my ailing spirit.

There were those Psalms: "The Lord is my strength and song, and has become my salvation." And "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

From Romans: "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Those words from Saint Matthew: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." And from Saint John: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

Humbly then, with faith in our hearts, my husband and I prayed: prayed not so much that I should be cured but that we should be given courage and hope to continue our lives . . . to bear our crosses with patience and fortitude. From the day we acknowledged God's part in the scheme of things and turned to Him, there was a miraculous change in my mental outlook. Faith and prayer exorcised my fears. The will to fight, the will to win, was restored to me.

Tom, ever alert to grasp any advantage in our fight, lost no time in consolidating the gains we made. Knowing my reluctance to let people see me but knowing, too, I never would be completely well mentally until I did bring myself

to be seen in public, he arrived home one afternoon and announced we were going to the movies that night. I protested, but he talked me down, revealing the planning that lay behind his proposal.

He had been to the movie house and arranged for a place to be prepared for my wheel chair and, besides, had made a reconnaissance of the intervening territory and plotted a course from our apartment to the theater that would not involve bumping the chair over steep curbs or gutters.

That night at the movies broke the social ice for me. Next came a visit to a football game between the University of Minnesota "Gophers" and the University of Michigan, and then—a sheer triumph for Tom—my presence in the Northrop Auditorium at a Minneapolis Symphony concert, Dmitri Mitropoulos conducting.

Understandably, my wardrobe at Minneapolis did not include an evening gown but Tom found one—a lovely white satin thing covered with rhinestone ornaments—in a little shop near our apartment and brought it home for me. The fit was not perfect but our maid knew a thing or two about dressmaking and made the necessary alterations in between preparing dinner for us.

I had not been able since my illness to bear to listen to other people making music of any kind and many months were to elapse before I could bring myself to listen to an opera broadcast or recording. But the reception I received from the audience when Tom wheeled me into the Northrop Auditorium for the symphony concert was so heart-warming that I was delighted I had come, and I derived genuine pleasure from listening to the music.

I wish here, too, to acknowledge my immense debt of

gratitude to the people of America and other countries for the encouragement they have given me which has been such a powerful force in helping my recovery and the resumption of my career. From the time I was stricken until this very day they have cheered me on my way. The literally thousands of wonderful letters I have received from all over the world and the knowledge that people of all faiths pray for me have brought me immeasurable comfort and inspiration.

Sister Kenny and my husband were unrelenting in their treatments and continued to get results. My regular singing practices helped, too, re-educating and strengthening the chest, abdominal and back muscles that a singer uses. I knew the resumption of my career remained highly improbable but my condition was improving. We had been with Sister Kenny three months and Tom had become a skilled Kenny operative when he had a brain wave that we should move to Miami. Winter's frigid months were beginning in Minneapolis and he thought I would be happier under Florida's blue skies and that the warm sand and water of his home state's beaches could be utilized in my recovery. He broached the move to Sister Kenny and she, satisfied he was competent to continue the treatments she prescribed, agreed to it.

We moved to a little cottage at Miami on the Hialeah Road not very far from the race track. We went to the beach every day, often joined by Tom's adorable family who brought delicious picnic lunches. The sun, the sand and the sea had the beneficial effect my husband anticipated. Within a week he had me on my hands and knees learning, like a baby, to crawl. At my first try I managed to traverse six feet and felt as elated as if I had sung one

of my best Brünnhildes. Within two weeks I was covering sixty feet and even getting down and into the water under my own steam. Tom refused any longer to regard me as an invalid. There was no more coddling for me! He left me no alternative but to resume my normal place in the home. He had me up at seven every morning; made me come to the table for meals; encouraged me with my singing. Before the end of our third week in Florida I was going through the role of Isolde at one sitting. Moreover, a share of the responsibility of running the house was dropped in my lap. I found myself ordering the food, planning our meals, supervising the dispatch of the laundry and generally doing a not too bad all-around wifely job.

My husband believes that all people recovering from diseases like infantile paralysis should be kept busy. Don't let them imagine to any degree more than is absolutely necessary that they are invalids or different from other people, he says. Keep them active to the limit of their capabilities. Don't give them time to feel sorry for themselves. Never show pity or give them too much sympathy. Give them jobs to do so they will feel useful and needed. Teach them the immense value of positive rather than negative thinking—to dominate the situation rather than let the situation dominate them. Even now when he is urging me to grapple with some new task (like writing this book), I wonder what the next will be. There is always something.

I have often been asked whether our love has suffered from the adversities which have beset our marriage from the very beginning. I can only say that every obstacle we have overcome has welded us closer together and made

our marriage stronger and happier. I feel that the great happiness and contentment we have found in our marriage could be shared by most couples (and divorces would be few) if from the very beginning of their marriage they worked together as *harmonious teams* to overcome their problems and guarded constantly against those happiness-wrecking devils: jealousy, impatience, intolerance and indifference.

No sooner had I schooled myself to carrying out the round-the-clock routine Tom set for me in Florida than he suggested my next venture: to sing in public again.

Christmas, 1941, was only a week or so off when he returned home one day from a visit with Doctor Everett Smith, the dynamic and scholarly pastor of the First Christian Church in Miami, where Tom's family had worshiped for many years.

"Darling, there's something I want you to do for me," he began, as matter-of-factly as though he were going to ask me to sew a button on his shirt. "I want you to sing at one of the Christmas services at Dr. Smith's church."

"Oh, Angel," I said, "I couldn't. I simply couldn't . . . not yet."

"Why couldn't you? You are singing all right, aren't you? You told me the other day that your voice is as good as it ever was."

"I'm not worried about that part of it. I am singing well. But how could I sing in the church . . . before people . . . in a wheel chair?"

"What do you mean . . . before people? They'll be there to hear you, not to look at you. Anyway, darling, please do this for me. This is my home town, don't forget, and I would like the people to hear my wife sing."

There was no getting out of it. This husband of mine, this master strategist who planned and plotted not only to get me well but to get me singing before the public again, brooked no interference.

I was still unable to sit up without assistance but when, on the night I was to sing at the church, Tom lifted me out of our car, he strapped me into the wheel chair in such a way that I was able to maintain a fairly upright position.

For me, who had been so proud of my physical appearance, it was a particularly mortifying ordeal to be wheeled into that church before a congregation of about a thousand people. If the church had been built like some of those Catholic churches I saw in France it would not have been so bad. The choir lofts there are up above the heads of the people so that the choristers are heard but not seen. But in this Miami church the choir was arrayed behind the pulpit and faced the congregation almost on the same level. With every eye fixed on me, Tom wheeled me down to the front of the church and, aided by the ushers, lifted me, still in the chair, onto a little platform built near the pulpit for the occasion. I loathe being pitied and I could not help feeling humiliated as I looked back at the sea of faces all so patently sympathetic. I wished I had not come; I felt incapable of going through with the ordeal confronting me.

If I could have sung directly I arrived it would have been easier. But no. Doctor Smith entered the pulpit, welcomed me, told his congregation about my "tragedy" and then led them in prayer for my recovery. Had it been in my power to do so, I would have fled. But, with the prayer for me over, Doctor Smith announced I would sing. The organ began the introduction to the "Lord's Prayer" and

when the time came, I began to sing. After the first phrase I forgot about how I looked, forgot the sympathetic people, forgot everything but the hymn and the singing of it.

The overtones of its final "Amen" were still humming in my ears when the congregation—including Doctor Smith—burst into applause. It was completely spontaneous. The people, preoccupied with listening to me, had forgotten their surroundings. Later in the service I sang the Gounod-Bach "Ave Maria" and the Christmas carol "Silent Night." There was another demonstration when I had finished. This time as I was wheeled past the good people I had no qualms. I looked the whole world in the face. I could now. Again I was Marjorie Lawrence the singer and I was on my way back . . . back to the Metropolitan, the Paris Opéra, Covent Garden, Carnegie Hall. There was a long way to go. The journey had only begun . . . but it had begun.

26. I Audition Again

WE STAYED six months in Miami which meant that we "celebrated" the first anniversary of my Mexico City mishap there. It meant also that for more than a year, during which we had been called upon to meet tremendous medical expenses, neither my husband nor myself had been able to do any work that earned us as much as one dollar. Our bank statements told the story and there were indications that the closing lines of the drab tale would be written in red ink if we did not do something about it.

On our way from Minneapolis to Miami we had stopped off briefly in New York while Tom wound up his affairs and closed his office there. The cost of my treatments and traveling plus ordinary day-to-day living expenses had cut a swathe through those savings of mine that had loomed so dangerously large in the days of our courtship. Tom did not have to bother now about having fallen in love with an affluent woman.

The six months at Miami had wrought a vast improvement in my condition. I was able to sit upright without props and the power of movement had been restored, partially at least, to every part of my body. But caring for me was still a full-time job that called for special knowledge and experience. Only my husband could do *that* job and he generously volunteered to give up, temporarily we hoped, his own career. He therefore was ruled out as the

member of our team to go out and repair our dilapidated fortunes.

I, on the other hand, was impatient to resume my singing career. I felt as I had in Paris in the weeks immediately preceding my debut. I knew I could sing; I wanted to sing; I wanted people to hear me. And if the letters and telegrams that came to me in Miami from all over the United States were any indication, there were many people who wanted to hear me again. Tom and I had a family conference. We decided we would go back to New York and I would do some radio work.

It was completely feasible that I should say I would "do" some radio work. Whenever in the past opera, concert, and recital dates had permitted, radio stations had fallen over themselves to put me on their programs. The thought never had occurred to me that a year away from public singing plus the effect of the myriad rumors and quaint reports circulated about what had happened to me at Mexico City and since, would cause any diminution in the stations' eagerness to book me.

Well, we came back to New York, took an apartment on 73rd Street and let the news go out along the musical grapevine that I was in town and interested in getting some radio dates. There was no resultant stampede from the direction of Radio City or Madison Avenue. Ultimately a good friend made a direct approach to André Kostelanetz and suggested he have me as soloist in one of his Coca-Cola programs over the Columbia Broadcasting System's network. I knew André well and had been friendly with his wife, Lily Pons, since my early days at the Paris Opéra.

Old friends though we were, André, that happy blend of sound businessman and capable musician, shied from put-

ting me on his program unless he was sure my voice was up to the mark. My emissary reported back to us that André would make no other promise than that he would give me an audition. My immediate reaction was to tell Mr. Kostelanetz to take his orchestra and the Coca-Cola Company and jump in the Hudson with them. Who did this fellow think he was? Hadn't I sung on the radio before? Hadn't he heard me time out of number at the opera? Audition . . . me audition for him? . . . Bah!

Once I had blown off steam, however, and got to thinking about it dispassionately, I realized André was behaving sensibly from both his point of view and mine. I invited him to the apartment to hear me. Up he came with an entourage of radio executives, as charming as ever, said just the right things about my illness and sat back while I sang Richard Strauss' "Zueignung."

"Well, there's nothing wrong with that voice," he said with a monstrous wink when I had finished. "But what will you sing for us?"

"Some Wagner?" I suggested.

"No, no, nothing like that." And I could see that Kostelanetz the businessman and Kostelanetz the musician were trying to get to terms.

"How about Strauss?"

"No . . . no. Haven't you got something Australian, something with some 'go' to it?"

I thought for a moment.

"There's one Australian song you might like. We call it 'Waltzing Matilda'."

"That sounds interesting," he said, like a bloodhound picking up a scent. "What is it? Have you got a copy? Let's have it."

"That's it . . . that's it. That's what I want," he whooped when I had sung the first few measures of "Matilda," and he grabbed up the music from the piano. Within a couple of days he had produced his beautiful arrangement of "Waltzing Matilda" which I have used hundreds of times since. I think it as effective a setting as there is of this song we Australians love so dearly and which is the closest thing to a folk song we possess.

Liederkranz Hall, whose name is a source of perennial inspiration to radio comedians and whose acoustics are the most perfect of any hall in Manhattan, was the scene of what *Variety* described as my "wheel-chair comeback" broadcast with Kostelanetz. The Coca-Cola Company titled the show "The Pause That Refreshes" but, as the date for it came round, contemplation of it was anything but refreshing for me. I knew how much depended on my coming through with a top-notch performance. I have always been among my own sternest critics and was satisfied I was singing well. But you never know with singing. Any singer . . . every singer . . . has an occasional "off" day and there is no way of knowing when that day will be.

I knew some would be listening to me who would not be overdistressed if I did sing badly: certain members of my own profession who would be only too happy to declare, "Poor dear! She's through. What a shame!" And there would be others among my unseen audience who, even if I sang my worst, would bravo and cheer and say how fine it was. I wanted to show the potential knockers I was still good enough to compete with them. And more, I wanted to sing well enough to know in my heart of hearts when the back thumpers came along with their words of cheer that they were telling the truth.

Gripping Tom's hand tightly I prayed every inch of the way as we drove from our apartment to Liederkranz Hall on the Sunday afternoon of the broadcast. I was as nervous as a debutante and twice as jittery. But when we got to the hall, there was the orchestra smiling encouragement; the master of ceremonies, Albert Spalding the violinist, who was to introduce me, prancing about and being very jolly; and André, checking over the program details, behaving with that *sang froid* peculiar to competent workmen when they are on the job. It was just like coming home . . . home after fifteen months in the wilderness of hospitals and massage tables and therapeutic pools. I promptly relaxed and forgot about myself. When the time came to sing I did so, confidently, easily.

My first group was made up of "Zueignung" and the Liza Lehmann setting of "Annie Laurie," and we closed the show with "Waltzing Matilda." I would have preferred to have sung more exacting music, music that would have given listeners a better "look" at my voice. But what I did sing fitted in well with the format of the Kostelanetz program and was enough to satisfy thousands of listeners—and myself—that I could go on with my singing.

There are no facilities for an audience in the Liederkranz Hall and we were able to squeeze in only a few close friends for my concert with Kostelanetz. The ordeal, therefore, of appearing once again before an audience (I exclude the congregation at Miami) still confronted me. But here again the gods were good and in my next appearance I was eased back into singing to people who could see as well as hear me, under the most congenial conditions imaginable.

Mrs. Albert Stillman of the Metropolitan Opera Guild was planning a moonlight concert in the garden of her home at Plainfield, New Jersey, to raise funds to help the American Red Cross buy kit-bags for troops going overseas. Prince George Chavchavadze, a pioneer in the "moonlight" concert field, was to play and I was delighted when Mrs. Stillman asked him to share the program with me. During my illness the United States had come into the war and my inability to make a contribution to the country's war effort disturbed me. Mrs. Stillman's invitation presented me with the chance for which I had been waiting. I accepted it without stopping to consider that it would involve my singing, while seated, for a fashionable and musical audience.

The concert took place in early September. The glorious garden was in full bloom and the warmth of waning summer lingered seductively on the flower-scented air. Everything was perfectly still and the moon full: it was a night made for singing. I set myself a more searching test, physically and musically, than I had for the broadcast. Edward Johnson and many others from the Metropolitan were to be in the audience and I wanted to show them I was well enough to sing a full program. I opened with Schubert's "Dem Unendlichen," an aria from *Carmen* and a ballad, "This Day is Mine," by the New Jersey composer Harriet Ware. And, with my talented friend Paul Meyer as accompanist, I concluded with the *Götterdämmerung* finale.

George Chavchavadze opened the program with the Beethoven "Moonlight Sonata" and some Chopin preludes, and before I sang the Wagner he did a bracket of Liszt and Debussy. The evening, therefore, besides show-

ing musicians present that my voice had not been impaired by my illness, demonstrated to Tom and me that I was strong enough to sit upright for a comparatively long period and sing at the end of it: that I could, should the opportunity present itself, sit on a stage long enough to participate in a concert with an orchestra.

My second public appearance came a few weeks later at a luncheon given by the Metropolitan Opera Guild at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, at which I was a guest of honor and performing artist, and Bruno Walter guest speaker. All my colleagues from the Metropolitan—Lily Pons, Lawrence Tibbett, Lily Djanel, Jarmila Novotna, Grace Moore, Emanuel List and the rest—were present and it was the first time most of them had seen me since I had farewelled them before going to Mexico City. Famous friends of the stage and screen like Jeanette MacDonald, Vera Zorina and Katharine Cornell also were in the audience. I was in fear and trembling lest their shock at seeing my condition would show too clearly on their faces.

With the curtains drawn, I was carried onto the stage of the Waldorf's spacious ballroom and placed on a settee while Mrs. August Belmont, founder of the Guild, went in front to announce me. In doing so, she recited the whole of Henley's "Invictus" and lauded my "unconquerable soul." Not since the night the people of Miami prayed for me at their Christmas service had there been a moment demanding stricter self-discipline. But my singer's instinct came to my rescue. The curtains were drawn back. There was a round of applause. Paul Meyer began the introduction to the *Götterdämmerung* finale . . . and I was on my way through the next lap of my journey back.

Afterwards my colleagues crowded around and smothered me with congratulations and with kisses. Edward Johnson shook my hands and predicted "You'll be back with us soon." And Bruno Walter, just as I was imagining I was going to come through a tensely emotional experience without surrendering to my feelings, caused me almost to capitulate when he came up and said, "The voice is as wonderful as ever . . . but greater still is the spirit that is behind it."

After my appearance at the Opera Guild luncheon, invitations for me to sing in public came in thick and fast. I accepted as many as I could. I sang at the Marine Corps' birthday celebrations again at the Waldorf, and on a program with Lawrence Tibbett, Madeleine Carroll and Clare Boothe Luce at the opening of the New York Seamen's Home. On May 16, 1943, with Vice-President Henry Wallace and Mayor La Guardia on the platform with me, I sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" before a crowd of 1,500,000 celebrating "I Am An American Day" in Central Park, New York. And I accepted every invitation I possibly could to help entertain at servicemen's canteens. Offers of professional engagements mounted, too, and my husband and I decided we should get an agent to handle the business side of them.

From the early days of my American career Lawrence Evans of Columbia Concerts had displayed an interest in my work, so we decided to ask him to put me on the Columbia roster. Evans came to see us and we told him what we had in mind. His customary effusiveness in the presence of musicians was turned off with an almost audible hiss.

"Oh . . . I don't know," he said. "We can't do any-

thing for you while you are like this. I tell you what: come and see me in a year. Yes, in a year, when you are back on your feet again."

"All right," I managed to say. "I'll do that. Thank you very much."

And Tom, fearful that all he had slaved to build might be toppled by a few more clumsy words, hastened the celebrated gentleman's exit. He saw him off the premises and hurried back to me. Already I was in tears.

"Darling, don't be upset," he said soothingly. "I suppose Columbia has all the artists it can handle and Evans doesn't think you want to do very much work yet awhile."

"No, Angel," I replied. "Don't try to fool me. Evans knows the concert business. People really don't want to hear me. They are sorry for me or intrigued at the idea of someone singing while sitting down . . . nothing more."

"Don't be silly! Would Bruno Walter tell you your voice was as good as ever if he didn't think so? Would Larry Tibbett and the rest of them from the Met say you were singing well if you were not?"

"Oh, Tom, I don't know what to think. And I was so happy . . . everything seemed to be going so well."

"It will continue to go well, too. Now, look here . . ."

And so he went on until he rekindled my hope and determination.

The 1942-43 concert season was on its way when some friends suggested I give a Town Hall recital. I was not immediately in favor of the idea. I did not want to rush my jumps and, moreover, I was still doubtful about how a concert audience would receive me; doubtful, too, of the manner in which the critics would regard my work. I was

haunted by the fear that musicians and critics would pity me and make allowances for me because I had been sick. I wanted no favors, no concessions. But my friends, led by Louis Bachner and his wife, Renée, with Tom's tacit support, continued to badger me so that finally I said, "Very well, get me a date at the Town Hall sometime in November and I'll do it."

As they went off to look at the Town Hall booking list, I hoped fervently they would find the hall completely booked for the rest of the season. But back they came . . . smiling. The night of November 29th was free. They had snapped it up.

"Wonderful, wonderful," I exclaimed, and hoped I looked as pleased as I led those dear people to believe I was.

It was necessary to have an agent to handle the recital, and happily we were directed to Austin Wilder who shortly before had acquired sole ownership of WGN, the concert management affiliated with the *Chicago Tribune*'s radio network. Young, energetic and knowledgeable, Austin Wilder came to see me and without any reference to my disability said he would be proud to have me on his roster. (At the time it included John Brownlee, Frederick Jagel, Karin Branzell, Egon Petri and Martha Graham.) Immediately he went to work to do his part towards making the recital something everyone in the United States would know about. Once the publicity began to appear I was glad I had agreed to sing. If the recital came off as I hoped, I would be (as one newspaper put it) "over the hump" and my re-establishment as a singer well-nigh complete.

I dipped deep into the treasure chest of my repertoire

for my recital program. I opened with Nitocris' aria from Handel's *Belshazzar,* then sang some Brahms and Ravel, ballads contemporary and traditional, and wound up again with the *Götterdämmerung* finale. Everything went famously although the cheering and the yelling when the curtains parted to reveal me on a settee in midstage put a lump in my throat that stuck there all through the Handel, rendering its accomplishment more than ordinarily difficult. The critics, thank God, won my respect and thanks, displayed no pity or sympathy and dealt with me as they might with any other Metropolitan star giving a recital, not hesitating to point out what they thought were the weaker points of my work. Their overall reaction, however, was most encouraging.

A double column heading at the top of *The New York Times* theater and music page proclaimed: *Marjorie Lawrence, in Comeback on Concert Stage, Wins Triumph.* Below it Noel Straus in the course of a long notice had written: *The recitalist was in magnificent trim . . . The long rest she has had did its share in giving freshness to the voice which was never before as absolutely firm in its tones, nor employed with such depth of human feeling.*

Virgil Thomson, who had become music critic of the *Herald Tribune* not long before, declared: *It happened not to have been my pleasure to hear Miss Lawrence at the opera. Persons familiar with her work tell me, however, that the enforced repose has freshened her voice and solidified her mastery of it. Certainly her singing last night was secure, resonant and masterful.* And Edward O'Gorman, of the *New York Post,* made this contribution to the symposium: *Two years may have clouded my memory a little but I don't believe Miss Lawrence's voice has ever sounded*

as rich and as powerful, and as uniquely dramatic in timbre as it did last night.

There were columns more and, in between answering our constantly ringing telephone to acknowledge congratulations from fellow artists and music lovers, Tom and I read every word of them. And in our prayers that night we included, with our usual petitions, a word of thanks. I was satisfied, as was my husband, that God in His dealings with us humans works on some divine principle of compensation: He never deprives us of anything without giving us something to make up for it. My voice had been restored and it was a more perfect instrument than before. Not only that—after having feared it had been lost to me, I cherished the gift of my voice more than ever. And, as the critics noted, my powers of interpretation had been enhanced.

It was not so very difficult that night to say, "Thy will be done."

27. The Opera Again

WHILE OPERA singers derive both pleasure and profit from other forms of vocal performance—concert, radio, oratorio and the rest—none gives them the complete artistic satisfaction and excitement that opera does. No amount of success outside the opera house could entice a singer voluntarily to forsake the operatic stage. Opera singing is the champagne of a singer's career. Once you have savored its delights you cannot be satisfied completely with anything else.

No sooner had I begun to sing in public again than the urge to appear once more in opera possessed me. It became an obsession and I had to fight hard against it because I imagined its realization to be utterly hopeless. I strove to steer my mind from even thinking about opera, but being in New York where there were so many things and people to recall my days at the Metropolitan, this was not easy.

I knew that instead of mooning about the opera I should have been counting my blessings. I thought back to my most distressing days at Hot Springs and Minneapolis; days, not so very distant, when the certain knowledge that I would be able to sing again, just sing—what, to whom and where were unimportant—would have made me the happiest woman in the world. And why should I not be happy now, now that I was back in New York, the world's

music center, with the critics raving about my voice and offers to sing pouring in from all over the United States?

I should have been satisfied, but I was not. That is how it is, after all, with anything in life, isn't it? We achieve a desire to get something . . . we get it . . . then we want something more! The something more I craved was to sing in opera again. Merely to sing an excerpt with an orchestra or a pianist at a concert was not enough. Rather did that aggravate my yearning for the real thing. Singing a role in an opera, with the lights and the orchestra and all the trappings; being back in the opera team, blending and matching my voice with the voices of others.

But deep down in my heart where I keep locked up those one or two secrets I share with nobody, I knew . . . or thought I knew . . . that until I could walk again I would never return to the operatic stage.

Events proved me wrong! The 1942-43 Metropolitan season was but a few weeks old when I returned to the famous old theater and in a new role to boot. Here is how it happened: with John Brownlee, Lawrence Tibbett, Grace Moore, Lily Pons and Lauritz Melchior among the instigators, my colleagues at the Metropolitan—and that included everyone, conductors, doormen, scene shifters, members of the orchestra, ushers and the rest—organized a testimonial concert "in tribute to the courageous spirit of Marjorie Lawrence." I was extremely proud and honored that my colleagues should be so generous with their talents and labor, particularly as the concert was scheduled for a Sunday night, the one night most of them could look forward to spending with their friends and families. But neither its organizers nor myself realized, when the concert idea was conceived, how important it was to prove for me.

A serious problem confronting the concert's organizers was coping with the plethora of talent that threatened to overwhelm them. All the conductors, nearly all the singers, the chorus, ballet and orchestra were offering their services. If every offer had been accepted the concert would have run until the end of the season. And, of course, the hazardous part of the business was the risk of leaving off the program anyone who had offered to perform, implying by so doing that their artistic attainment was less remarkable than that of someone else.

It was after a program conference at the Met, at which this embarrassment of riches had been discussed, that Edward Johnson phoned me and made the suggestion which brought me back to the opera stage.

"Why don't you sing yourself?" he asked.

"Me?" I responded with a laugh that I hoped hid my excitement.

"Yes, you!"

"What could *I* sing?"

"Well, there's Venus. You could sing that sitting. And we haven't had a really first-class Venus down here since Fremstad."

"Oh, I've always sung Elisabeth. I don't know Venus."

"But you could learn it in time," responded Johnson, by now thoroughly excited by his idea. "We could do the overture, the Bacchanale and the Venusberg scene. Lauritz could sing Tannhäuser."

Learn it in time! I would have learned Venus or any other role in twenty-four hours if only the learning of it lay between me and my singing at the Metropolitan again. Directly Edward Johnson was off the phone I called Edyth Walker and Louis Bachner, enlisting their services in mas-

tering the new role. I knew it well days before the rehearsal with Melchior and Erich Leinsdorf, who was to conduct.

All New York seemed converging on the Metropolitan as my husband and I drove down through Times Square on the night of the performance, December 27, 1942, and there were nearly four thousand people packed into the opera house when the curtains went up.

My heart overflowed with emotion as I was carried in my wheel chair up the stairs leading to the stage-door entrance—the stairs up which I had bounded so many times. Tom purposely made our arrival a little late because he wanted to avoid giving me any opportunity for brooding and remembering. As it was, I was rushed to my old dressing room and was so completely occupied with my make-up, costume and last-minute look at the *Tannhäuser* score, I had no time for anything else. Edward Johnson and his assistant, Frank St. Leger, came in to kiss me and wish me luck and then Tom wheeled me from my dressing room out through the wings and onto the stage, lifted me out of my chair and placed me on Venus' couch.

Everyone—stage director Defrère, stagehands, chorus, ballet, Melchior and the other singers—gave me such a genuinely warm welcome and behaved as though it were perfectly normal for me to be seated that they buoyed up my spirits and made me forget my self-consciousness. But as we were hushed to silence and the orchestra began the beautiful *Tannhäuser* overture, I had to steel myself and try, by concentrating on the role I was to sing, to shut out the deep emotions pulling at me from all sides. Like the kaleidoscope of events that is said to flash through the minds of drowning persons, scenes of my former roles on

this stage now flashed before me. Here I had leapt on Grane in *Götterdämmerung*, had bounded about the rocks in *Walküre*, and danced the wicked, sensuous Dance of the Seven Veils in *Salome*.

Sensing what was happening to me, my husband came over just before the curtain was raised and, giving me a poke in the ribs, muttered the traditional salutation given by French singers before a performance, "Merde," which best remains untranslated. I should say here that I never receive any affectionate caress from my husband before a performance. Usually it is this poke in the ribs and some such remark as "Come on, Angel. Get going." I must admit that more than once such treatment has pulled me out of a reverie that might have engulfed me and possibly marred a performance. And so it was on this night when I came back to the Metropolitan. Tom's poke in the ribs woke me up to the realities of the situation. Here was the biggest challenge confronting me. I had to make good.

When the great golden curtain rose and I saw the crowd-packed caverns of the opera house, I did have a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach—not of fear that I might not sing well, but that I had the audacity to appear before them in an operatic role when I could not walk a step. But by the time my cue came—*"Geliebter, sag"*—I was in complete control of my emotions and my voice. I forgot the audience and my physical disability and was conscious only of the impassioned, thrilling music and that I was singing once more in opera—and in my beloved Metropolitan.

The story of the night was told very well in *The New York Times* the following morning by Mr. Meyer Berger, told so well I am going to repeat his story now:

Out front before 8 o'clock last night, the Metropolitan Opera House audience filtered into its seats. Behind the curtain, stagehands, satyrs, angels, graces and nymphs fluttered, pirouetted or stood in whispering groups. Then a hush fell on the cavernous, dim-lit setting for the opening scene in *Tannhäuser*.

A wheel chair came on stage from the right. Desire Defrère, the voluble stage director, a prompter and dungareed sceneshifters cleared way for it in the extraordinary quiet. The chair was pushed gently beside Venus's divan. Tenderly the director, stagehands and a giant medieval huntsman lifted Marjorie Lawrence from the chair.

The quiet deepened as she settled slowly on the divan. Lauritz Melchior, red-wigged Tannhäuser, hovered over her. Since spring in 1941, when paralysis overtook her in Mexico, Miss Lawrence had been absent from the opera. Last night was to determine whether she could go on with her career or not.

She settled herself in the deep golden pillows. Betty Bee, her dressmaker, and the gray-haired woman who is her dresser, twisted their hands nervously. Thomas King, the soprano's husband, stood close at hand. He whispered to her. She smiled and patted her golden coiffure.

Orange and blue spotlights, high in the flies, blazed and burned in her wide bracelets and in the jeweled girdle that held her diaphanous pink robes. Betty Bee handed her a tumbler of cool water. She sipped from it and sank back in the pillows.

Around her bacchantes danced, satyrs leaped and she smiled upon them. Her eyes were bright. A little stagehand told another—"She's got something, she has. She's got guts." The taller stagehand glanced at her and nodded. He said, "I'll say!"

Outside the overture sighed, and rose and fell. An excitable woman in a beaver coat rushed into the wings. She

hissed to attract the smiling soprano's attention. Miss Lawrence turned and nodded towards her reassuringly. The woman twinkled her fingers and Miss Lawrence covertly returned the gesture.

"Good luck, Marjorie," the woman whispered, and idling huntsmen and monks and satyrs took it up and whispered, "Good luck."

The curtain rose and in the dim half-light, after the graces and angels had left the scene, the chorus sang, sweetly subdued. Melchior awakened at Venus's feet. Finally it was Venus's cue. Again a hush fell on the house.

Then Venus sang. The notes soared and softened. They fell from the singer's lips, liquid and soothing but steady. Miss Lawrence's arms extended towards Tannhäuser. Song poured from her and it was rich and beautiful. She fondled the knight's hair and the music flowed.

The gray-haired little dresser all but cracked her knuckles in sheer delight. Tears brimmed in her eyes. She swept all about her in the darkened wing with triumphant glance. "Tell Mr. Johnson," she said ecstatically, "not all the great sopranos are in Europe. We've got one here, too."

Heads nodded in eager, silent agreement.

And finally the song died. The stage darkened. Desire Defrère rushed upon the group in the wings. "Her legs," he whispered hoarsely. "Her legs, please. Watch her legs there."

Stagehands cleared the supers, the friends and the staring angels.

"Move up there," they demanded, fiercely. "Move up there. Give her room."

Two huskies pulled at long ropes and Venus rolled easily off stage. Dr. King stepped up with a lively smile and whispered to her. She smiled back, flushed and happy.

A giant huntsman towered over the cushioned divan. He rumbled "You were magnificent," and she thanked him.

At the end of the act, stagehands pushed the divan on stage again. The curtain opened and audience applause broke like violent surf. After Melchior and Julius Huehn came out to share the bow briefly, they retired again.

As they did, the applause grew and expanded into a three-minute demonstration. Metropolitan audiences seldom roar in chorus, but this one did. "Bravo!" swelled from thousands of throats and in the galleries excited patrons stamped until the curtains fell . . .

The ovation described by Mr. Berger was adequate assurance that the audience had enjoyed my performance. But the things New York's critics had to say next day encouraged me even more to believe there still was a place for me, even if I were incapacitated, on the operatic stage. Jerome Bohm, I think, epitomized the views of the critics when he wrote in the *Herald Tribune*:

How sorely operagoers have missed Miss Lawrence's art was proved by the tremendous ovation. Never-ending shouts of approval greeted her remarkable accomplishment. For Miss Lawrence's delineation of Venus has not been equaled here since the days of Olive Fremstad.

Edward Johnson was delighted. He declared that the *mise en scène* evolved for *Tannhäuser* should be retained regardless of who sang Venus, so that the seductress could, very appropriately, remain on her couch throughout the first act. Mr. Johnson there and then invited me to sing Venus in the regular performances of *Tannhäuser* the company would give during the season. I fulfilled these engagements and when, at the end of the New York season,

the Metropolitan went on tour, I sang Venus every time *Tannhäuser* was presented.

Everywhere warmhearted American audiences gave me thrilling ovations. In Chicago there was such a to-do at the end of the first act of *Tannhäuser* that Lawrence Tibbett, who was singing Wolfram, laughingly exclaimed, "Good God, Lawrence, have you brought your claque with you?"

"Yes, Larry," I replied, "nearly four thousand of them."

Tibbett roared his resonant laugh and whacked me on the back as though I were his favorite football player. There were other singers in the company, though, who did not enjoy my success as Larry Tibbett did. Already the news was coming back to me that it was being whispered that I was trading on my infirmity—that if I chose, I could get up and walk. But more of that later.

In February, 1943, with Frederick Schorr, Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Symphony, I sang excerpts from *Walküre* at a Carnegie Hall concert, and as a result of this and a number of other appearances I made about the same time, Austin Wilder's office was inundated with requests for my services from all over the United States and Canada. For the rest of that season we were constantly on the move fulfilling radio, concert and recital engagements. Tom supervised the building of a collapsible wheel chair that we took everywhere with us—even when we flew to Havana, Cuba, where I gave recitals early in 1943 for the noted Pro Arte series. To facilitate "handling" me, we had made a canvas seat with leather handles which fitted into my wheel chair and in which I was hoisted in and out of the chair and into airplanes, cars and trains with a minimum of fuss.

Another memorable event at this time was when I had the honor to receive a Certificate of Merit from Sigma Alpha Iota, no doubt the world's largest and finest musical fraternity. I take great pride in being an Honorary Member.

On one tour when we were far from New York I received a telegram from Sir Thomas Beecham asking if I would sing Isolde for him in a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* he planned to give for Madame Athanèse David, director of the Montreal Music Festival. Naturally I imagined it was a concert version of the opera he had in mind, but I telegraphed back asking for details. I heard no more from Beecham until the day we returned to New York. We were barely inside the apartment before the phone rang. It was Austin Wilder. Beecham, he said, was in New York, and wanted to bring the Metropolitan's stage director, Herbert Graf, to see me immediately.

"What do they want to see me about?" I asked.

"I think you'd better let Sir Thomas tell you himself," Wilder replied.

"Is it about this concert in Montreal?"

"I think it might be."

"Might be? What is this?"

"Sir Thomas will tell you. We'll be up this afternoon."

For several hours I had to curb my inquisitiveness. By the time Beecham, Graf and Wilder arrived I had dreamed up a dozen possible reasons for Wilder's hedging and the purpose of Beecham's visit. All were wide of the mark. It never entered my mind that Beecham might want me to sing a full operatic version of *Tristan.* But that was exactly what he wanted to see me about, as he announced without preliminary palaver.

"But that's impossible!" I cried. "What about the *mise en scène*?"

"My dear, don't worry your head about that. It not only is possible to work out a *mise en scène*, we already have one prepared."

Herbert Graf nodded.

For a minute or two I was speechless and then, overwhelmed with joy, I exclaimed, "Why, Sir Thomas, of course I'll sing Isolde. If you have so much faith in me the least I can do is attempt to justify it."

"Very good, then, that's settled," said Beecham with a fantastically youthful twinkle in his eye. "We have arranged the performance for May 15th. Arthur Carron will sing Tristan."

Because Isolde is on stage practically throughout the opera, it was not necessary for Beecham and Graf to make many vital changes in the action of *Tristan*. The first act presented very few difficulties because even normally Isolde is reclining on her couch when the curtain goes up for the first time and reveals the broad deck of Tristan's ship. Graf had arranged the act so that while Isolde remained seated the whole of the movement revolved about her: as Isolde is a princess this seemed proper enough. The arrangement called for much more movement and acting for Brangaene but, happily, singers who have done the Brangaene role with me have always been most co-operative.

Graf reshaped the opera so that, instead of making her entrance with Brangaene at the beginning of the second act, Isolde already is seated on the bench in the garden when the curtain goes up. Brangaene gives her the torch which Isolde extinguishes. Isolde, from the bench, then

signals the waiting Tristan with her scarf. Tristan runs on stage to Isolde. They embrace and sing of their passionate love that culminates in the heavenly duet beginning, *"O sink' hernieder Nacht der Liebe . . . "*

Because Isolde cannot make her last act entry until that stanza of the opera is well on its way, this part of *Tristan* presented the most difficult staging problem to Beecham and Graf. They solved it by having Kurvenal, having made his usual exit to investigate the shepherd's report of the approaching ship, return carrying Isolde in his arms—a perfectly normal procedure when one considers (once again) that Isolde is a princess, and the rocky inaccessibility of Tristan's hideaway. Perfectly normal, too, in view of Wagner's text when Kurvenal sings to Tristan before going off: *"Sie trag' ich herauf: trau' meinem Armen! . . . "* which, broadly translated, is: "I will carry her. Trust my strong arms."

United States and Canadian music circles were extremely intrigued by the announcement that I would sing Isolde. Argument waxed loud and strong over the ability of Beecham and Graf to make the necessary adjustments to the opera without impairing the impact of its music and drama, but critics from both sides of the border agreed after the opera that the Beecham-Graf adaptation was completely successful and they were most laudatory about my singing.

New York newspapers devoted columns of space to the performance and we came home to the big city expecting an immediate invitation for me to sing Isolde at the Metropolitan the following season. When after weeks of waiting no summons came, Austin Wilder approached Edward Johnson. He found that although Johnson was de-

lighted with my artistic success in Montreal, he was cool to the suggestion that I should sing Isolde at the Metropolitan. Johnson complained that my appearance would cause many staging difficulties and questioned whether New York operagoers would appreciate an immobilized Isolde. Wilder tried hard, but Johnson was adamant.

Opera devotees and many of my friends began to question Johnson, too. When, they wanted to know, would I be singing Isolde at the Metropolitan. The report came back to us that Mr. Johnson and his assistant, Frank St. Leger, gave them all the one reply: "You know how we all love Marjorie and how we want to have her here with us. But the Metropolitan does not want to capitalize on an infirmity."

I did not find it easy to believe that either Edward Johnson or Frank St. Leger could have spoken thus: not the Edward Johnson who had brought me back to the operatic stage and who, although originally skeptical about my being able to do Isolde, had appeared so extremely happy over my success in the part at Montreal. If my portrayal of Isolde, or Venus for that matter, had been rendered inartistic because of my disability I would have been the first to acknowledge it. Believe me, I would have accepted the blow and concentrated on other aspects of my career than opera. But, as I have said, operagoers and critics acclaimed my portrayals of the roles not only as being enjoyable but artistically sound.

Therefore I could not accept as authentic the talk about the Metropolitan's reluctance to "capitalize on an infirmity." I knew there was some other reason why the Metropolitan management was making it difficult for me



Invincible Press

At Buckingham Palace, 1945, with my husband, Queen Elizabeth and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose



Invincible Press

The Berlin Christmas concert, 1946, with Brig. Gen. Gailey, Gen. Kotikov, Maj. Gen. Keating, Gen. Sir Bryan Robertson, Gen. Lucius D. Clay, Gen. Noiret

to sing Isolde in its opera house. And it was not long before I discovered that reason. Then I realized that Messrs. Johnson and St. Leger were pretty much victims of circumstance.

Each year they are confronted with the task of staging a season of operas. The number of singers available for some roles is very limited—this was especially so during the war when importations could not be made from Europe. If, for some reason, the services of singers doing these exacting roles were denied the Metropolitan, Messrs. Johnson and St. Leger would be hard put, I knew, to present a repertoire to New York opera patrons that would permit the Metropolitan to retain its high rank among the opera houses of the world. Therefore the Metropolitan management is subject to the demands and wishes of certain ladies and gentlemen on their roster of singers.

I have heard—though it seems incredible—that a few singers, after the furore I had created by singing Venus in New York and Isolde in Montreal, became exceedingly jealous and complained to the Metropolitan management. They seemed to feel that regardless of how well they sang, if I were in a cast with them, mine would be the performance that would attract all the public notice and acclaim. This was downright nonsense of course.

But I did sing Isolde at the Metropolitan during the 1943-44 season and, by some means of which I am not aware, the management was able to mollify the feelings of those singers who had sought to end my Metropolitan career.

Once every season the Metropolitan gives a performance of one opera, the proceeds from which go to aid the work of the Grenfell Association in bringing social and medical

services to people living on the isolated coasts of Labrador and Newfoundland. I had assisted the Grenfell Association previously, and directly the Metropolitan allocated it a date for its 1943-44 performance, the chairman of the Association's executive committee, Dr. Beekman Delatour, asked that the opera to be performed should be *Tristan* and suggested (later he *insisted*) that I sing Isolde.

And so it came about that on March 14, 1944, I achieved my long-cherished ambition and desire to sing Isolde at the Metropolitan. Sir Thomas Beecham conducted and it was the only occasion of the many on which we have performed together that I have seen this spectacular adornment of music display any sign—if not of plain nervousness —of intense excitement. Lauritz Melchior was in magnificent voice, coming to light with one of his really grand Tristans and giving complete co-operation in the scenes we had together. And that authoritative artist and good friend, Kerstin Thorberg, was a wonderful Brangaene, accomplishing the necessary additional acting with consummate artistry and succeeding brilliantly in making it appear normal to the part.

The whole production went perfectly. I was in good form and Beecham, happy as a sandboy at the reception I received at the end of the first act, put his head in my dressing room at the interval and said, "Take your time about getting back to the stage, my dear. That crowd out there will wait all night for you now if you want them to."

The opera ended in a furore. I took curtain after curtain, but the crowd refused to leave the theater. Even the orchestra . . . I say "even" because those hard-working gentlemen in the pit have more than enough of the opera

house by the time a season is through . . . stayed on waving their bows at me and applauding with the audience. Finally, when the cheering was over, the critics exceeded themselves in praising my performance and the effectiveness of the production. Their enthusiasm was unanimously reflected in their columns as the following newspaper extracts show. *New York Times*: "Hers was a brilliant artistic achievement. She infused her voice with an intensity hard to imagine being surpassed." *New York Herald Tribune*: "It is many years since New York audiences have heard so veracious an account. She is the first Isolde to deliver the music as Wagner wrote it, including the high *C*'s, who has appeared here in some time." *New York Sun*: "So successful that we need scarcely doubt that it will be repeated again and again." *New York Journal American*: "One of the greatest successes of her American career." *P.M.*: "Marjorie Lawrence provided the most believable heroine in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in many long seasons."

Then we had a repetition of events that followed my riding Grane off the stage in *Götterdämmerung* during my first Metropolitan season. The doubters and knockers overwhelmed me with congratulations.

"We knew you could do it, old girl," they told me. And, with an adroitness at which I marveled, they succeeded in taking unto themselves a part of the responsibility for the triumph Beecham, the rest of the cast and I had achieved.

Beecham smiled urbanely through all the fuss, accepting his share of the praise with his customary courtliness and grace. And to all within his hearing he declared, "Now you have heard the world's greatest Isolde."

The only operatic role I have undertaken since my illness, in addition to Venus and Isolde, has been Amneris in *Aïda.*

Something always seems to happen when we are in the throes of packing for one of our longer jaunts! Just as Tom was trying to clamp down the lid of the last suitcase before we took off on one of our flying trips to Europe in 1946, we had a phone call from Tony Stivanello, stage director of the Cincinnati Summer Opera, asking if I would sing Amneris for him on my return to the United States. Tony said that he and Oscar Hild, the opera's director, had evolved a *mise en scène* which, they felt, was very effective and were sure I would approve.

"Besides," added Tony, "you must sing this for us. Oscar and I are fed up with suffering attacks of the jitters whenever we do *Aïda* wondering how the contraltos who sing Amneris for us will manage the *B* flats in the last act."

So, although I always had sung the title role in *Aïda* before, I trusted in the sound artistic sense of Tony and Oscar and promised to sing Amneris. I am very glad I did. They solved all the movement problems for me by having Amneris carried on and off the stage on a picturesque palanquin by six giant Negroes. I have sung Amneris several times since—at Cincinnati, Montreal and, on one highly memorable occasion in 1947, at the Paris Opéra.

28. The "Old Veteran"

A PERPETUAL source of inspiration to me in the days following the resumption of my career was the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Whenever I was assailed by doubts about my ability to keep going, to improve my art or to counter the machinations of those who sought to drive me from my profession, I thought of the President and was reassured.

Here was a man, paralyzed as I was, carrying on a task beside which mere singing paled as paltry and of little consequence. I had my enemies, but what miserable pygmies they were compared with the forces that strove to destroy Roosevelt! He had led a peace-loving but mighty nation to war. Doing so, he automatically made himself leader of those elements of humanity who had ranged themselves in a to-the-death struggle with the most fearful tyranny the powers of evil had ever concocted. As well, he had hoisted himself as the target for vicious shortsighted isolationists and selfish standpatters among his own people who concentrated their powerful influence to persuade Americans that Roosevelt had dragged them into war to satisfy some personal whim or fancy.

When I considered what Roosevelt was *doing* . . . in spite of being paralyzed and in spite of his calumniators . . . what I was *trying to do* appeared by comparison so

little and so easy that I went my way with new confidence and without fear.

I am not, nor was I at any time, a New Dealer. The ramifications and calculated effects of Roosevelt's social and economic policy are beyond my ken. Apart from its broadest generalities I know nothing of it. Politics and economics are, as the professors say, "outside my field." But I think I know people. And of Franklin Roosevelt I say that here was a man among men; a humanitarian, a decent human being, a scholar and a hero who gave his life in a noble cause.

I first met the Roosevelts, the President and his gracious wife, at a dinner and musicale they gave at the White House in 1936 for the Supreme Court. I could not help but be captivated and impressed by the President's warm, vibrant personality and his musical knowledge and appreciation. What a gay and lovely evening it was, and not a bit stiff and formal as I had feared it might be. Of course, I was able to walk then and was escorted about the historic mansion by presidential aides and some of the Justices themselves. I had not been in the United States very long at the time, having arrived only a few months earlier for my Metropolitan debut. I was thrilled by the attention and flattery paid me by so distinguished a gathering and also by the fact that only one other artist and myself had been invited to provide the music for the evening.

My second visit to the White House, in January, 1943, was made under very different circumstances. I was in a wheel chair and had been invited to take part in a series of functions marking the President's birthday, the proceeds from which were to go to the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. Lawrence Tibbett and I represented

the Metropolitan and the Hollywood contingent included Robert Young, James Cagney, Edgar Bergen, Loretta Young, Roy Rogers, Al Jolson, Janet Blair, Laraine Day and Jack Benny.

I had been looking forward to seeing the President again and was greatly disappointed to find he was not on hand when we went to the White House for a delightful luncheon Mrs. Roosevelt gave for us in the huge State dining room. Actually, although few Americans knew it, Roosevelt was out of the country at the time on his secret war mission to Casablanca. He had planned to be back for the birthday celebrations but could not make it. Without doubt the preceding year had been the most arduous of the President's sixty-one. It had seen his long, hazardous journeys for his talks with Churchill and other Allied leaders and, under his overall direction, the development in the United States of the mightiest war machine the world had ever known.

I wondered how it was possible for any man to accomplish all Roosevelt had, wondered what effect his Herculean labors must be having on his health. Before I left Washington that time, the President's friend and then White House spokesman, Stephen Early, told me the President's working schedule had become so full that it left him practically no time for himself. He had been compelled to give up his daily swims in the White House pool—previously one of his great pleasures and his only form of exercise. There is no doubt, and President Roosevelt must have known it, that by working the way he did and forsaking all measures essential to the preservation of his health, he shortened his life by many years.

Only a couple of weeks after my White House visit, I

was reminded most dramatically that despite his onerous duties and his sacrificed leisure, Franklin Roosevelt *made* time to follow the promptings of his generous heart and to hold out an encouraging hand to fellow travelers along life's highway.

To mark my return to the Metropolitan and also to celebrate my birthday, the Town Hall Club of New York tendered me a "victory dinner" on February 16, 1943. Men and women celebrated in many spheres were present and for me it was another of those bewildering occasions on which I alternated between smiles and tears as I listened to words of praise and encouragement from the several speakers.

Experience has conditioned me to encounter the distasteful, the nasty things of life with better emotional aplomb than the pleasant and the good. When I am harshly criticized, when I discover myself the target of animosity, for that matter whenever things go wrong for me in any way, I am able to put on a good front and come through the incident without giving anyone an inkling of how I feel. But when people are overwhelmingly generous to me or show genuine appreciation of something I have done, I melt. My throat fills with lumps and the tears come.

That is how it was on the night of my "victory dinner" in New York. Actually I did very well and was able to keep a firm hold on myself until my friend Basil O'Connor spoke. He ended an eloquent address with these words: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, I want to read you a letter I have received for our guest of honor. It comes to her, through me, from a friend of hers who asks me to read it."

Then he began to read:

My dear Miss Lawrence:

I am asking my old friend, Basil O'Connor, President of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, to bring you a message tonight at the Victory Dinner, so appropriately tendered to you at the Town Hall Club in New York City.

Your courage and faith and determination in overcoming the aftereffects of infantile paralysis and thereby restoring to the public the opportunity of enjoying your beautiful art—all result in a victory—your victory—which is an inspiration to everyone at any time.

But today when all we love and cherish is jeopardized by those who take their rules of life from the brutality of barbarism and preach and practice that all but the physically perfect should be summarily liquidated, your victory exposes with the light of truth the Godlessness of the lie they teach.

In the days ahead, while we fight for life itself, those whose trials and sorrows may be many and heavy will courageously carry on in the spirit you have so nobly exhibited.

Mirrored in your great victory for many years to come, those beset with burdens and harassed with handicaps will see the glory and the satisfaction of the good fight—well won.

From an old veteran to a young recruit my message to you is "Carry on."

Cordially yours,

Basil O'Connor paused there. I had not the faintest idea who had written the letter but its eloquent, flattering words moved me profoundly. When Basil O'Connor finally uttered the writer's name—Franklin D. Roosevelt—the gathering stood, applauded and cheered while I wept openly and unashamed.

The last time I spoke to Franklin Roosevelt was on the day before he left for Yalta—his last historic mission abroad on behalf of the Allied cause. I had been invited, at the President's request, to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at his fourth inaugural dinner at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. Next day my husband and I were asked to sit near the Roosevelt family during the ceremony on the south portico of the White House at which the President made his speech accepting a further term of office. The President looked very tired, but directly he was hoisted to his feet and began to speak, the tiredness dropped from him like the cloak he cast from his shoulders. His dignity and authority immediately impressed all of us as we listened to his words.

There was a tea at the White House later in the afternoon. The President did not appear and the story was circulated that his doctors had ordered him to rest and he would not be seeing anyone. I watched Mrs. Roosevelt, with the wife of the newly elected Vice-President, Mrs. Harry Truman, at her side as she received her three thousand guests—the entire diplomatic corps, the Cabinet, members of Congress, and all kinds of celebrities. Although, as events showed, she must have been beside herself worrying about her husband's health and new onerous duties demanding his immediate attention, she had a word and a smile for everyone. Despite the throng she made all of us feel perfectly at home.

When her last guest was in and the party was zooming along under its own power, Mrs. Roosevelt walked over to me and tapped me on the shoulder.

"Would you like to see the President?" she whispered.

"Oh! That would be wonderful," I gasped.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

February 14, 1943.

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Cordially yours,

Franklin D. Roosevelt

"He would like to see you. Follow me."

With Mrs. Roosevelt clearing the way, Tom pushed me through the party. We went from the reception room along a passageway and up a ramp to the President's special elevator that took us right in to his private quarters. We found him seated in an armchair poring over a file of documents. Now I was close to him, I could see how worn and tired he was: his face was drawn, his eyes heavy-lidded. But he was as courteous and smiling as ever. His eyes sparkled and laughter came readily to his lips. As he talked I had the impression that he was completely absorbed in our conversation. For the time, it seemed he was interested in nothing else. Inevitably we talked about infantile paralysis.

"Say, Miss Lawrence," he asked, "precisely where did it get you?"

"In both my legs, but particularly in my knees," I told him.

"In your knees, eh? It's funny we always seem to go in the knees. That's where it got me, too."

And then, leaning forward in his chair and nodding his head in that characteristic Roosevelt way to give emphasis to his words, he added, "You know, my doctors tell me you can improve in this thing until you are seventy-two. You've got lots of time yet."

We laughed and the small talk continued. He flattered me with his knowledge of the work I had been doing—of my troop concerts and singing Isolde at the Metropolitan. But when the time came for us to leave we had barely reached the door before the President was again engrossed with the documents he had been studying when we came in. Next day, as I have said, he was on his way to Yalta

for those talks with Churchill and Stalin which were to set the course of human destiny for years, perhaps generations, to come.

I made another trip to Washington . . . early in April, 1945, I was to give a recital in Constitution Hall. Mrs. Roosevelt was coming; so were many of the diplomatic and socially great of the Federal capital. I was looking forward to the recital as a gala occasion. But when I awoke from the afternoon nap I invariably take before a concert, the news was conveyed to me that Franklin Roosevelt was dead . . . I canceled the recital and sent to the White House the mountain of bouquets that had arrived for me at my hotel and Constitution Hall. Heavyhearted, I returned to New York feeling, as millions of men and women everywhere felt, that in Roosevelt's passing I had suffered a terrible personal loss.

29. Off to the Wars

I SUPPOSE singing at army camps and hospitals all over the United States was partially responsible for it, but from the time I had recovered sufficiently from my illness to take an interest in what was going on in the world, I was possessed by a burning desire to make my contribution to the war effort. United States Army authorities assured me I was doing a quite valuable home-front job—especially in bucking up the morale of sick and wounded troops. But it was not enough to satisfy me. I wanted more than a home-front job. I wanted to get nearer the thick of things. At first the army was very reluctant to send me and my wheel chair to the battle fronts and said I could expect no special consideration if I did go abroad. I was told very bluntly that the authorities were not prepared to accept responsibility for what might happen to me and my health.

But I could not be fobbed off! Whenever I got close enough to anyone with influence—American, Australian, English—I submitted them to what Australian soldiers call an ear-bashing and begged them to pull whatever strings needed pulling to get me overseas. I was not unduly surprised, therefore, but wildly elated when early in 1944 an invitation came to me through the Australian government to tour the Southwest Pacific to sing to American, Australian, English, Indian and Dutch units in that zone. Tom, rated 4F by his draft board because of an old injury, was

as excited as I at the prospect of getting out among the men who had just begun the long drive that was to end among the ruins of Tokyo.

We were given only a few weeks to be on our way. But with the aid of our sheet anchor in any storm, our devoted Negro maid, Clara Weekes, we were packed and ready to leave on time. Mayor La Guardia gave us a send-off at City Hall and never had I seen His Honor in so wistful a mood. The story has since leaked out of his efforts to break the chains attaching him to the mayoral desk and get closer to the fighting fronts. But I was quite puzzled that day in his office at his repeatedly asking me, "How did you do it?"

If ever there was a frustrated warrior it was Mayor La Guardia!

I was so excited about my trip that I was entirely oblivious of the fact that my husband was showing little enthusiasm for the journey by ship across the Pacific. Little did I suspect the reason for his frantic efforts to break down the regulation precluding civilian women from flying the Pacific; little did I suspect what a hero I had married until we were a couple of days at sea and discovered that Tom is a very poor sailor. A wretched, unhappy victim of mal de mer, the prospect of even a short trip in a deep-sea fishing boat fills him with horror.

But no one would have guessed it as he climbed manfully up the gangplank of the little Swedish freighter, the *Parakoola,* which was to take us nonstop across the wide Pacific from Los Angeles to "somewhere in Australia"—twenty-four days at sea in a small ship stripped of all creature comforts the better to perform her wartime job. How he faced up to the journey and all it threatened I do



My husband and I at Harmony Hills



On my feet

not know. Two days out he was forced to take to his bed. He remained there until we docked in Sydney. He was completely helpless. And, I realized with staggering suddenness, so was I. Until then I had taken my husband pretty much for granted. He was always on hand to carry out my every wish, even to anticipate it. Without him I was lost. The pattern of living we had devised was shattered. I looked at him, lying in his bunk unshaven, his eyes closed, his cheeks pale green and shrunken. I was fearfully afraid and very, very helpless.

The *Parakoola's* crew included one stewardess. She was extremely kind and well-intentioned, but hoisting me about, getting me in and out of the bath, putting me to bed and doing all those other tasks Tom took in his stride, were beyond her. The second mate, a massive Swedish sailor, a born son of the sea who lavished an ardent love on the *Parakoola* and talked about the ship as though it were a most beautiful woman, had come to me soon after we came aboard and, proud of his strength, had undertaken to carry me anywhere I wished to go.

"You want to go anywhere," he said, "just holler Gunnar and I'll come."

I hollered Gunnar many times before we got to Sydney and the big, kind Swede always came to me on the run to carry me from the deck to my cabin, to the dining room or the tiny saloon.

Two of our seven fellow passengers were a young Australian couple, Frank and Yvonne Nicholls, who came from Birregurra which I mentioned earlier as being not far from my home town, Dean's Marsh. They were going home after two years' service with the Australian Military Mis-

sion in London. At our first meeting Frank said, with typical Australian casualness, "Oh, if there's anything I can do for you, let me know and I'll try to fix it." Even if he had not made his offer, I would have turned instinctively to Frank Nicholls after Tom became ill. I am always completely at home with other Australians, feeling we are members of one family, and I never hesitate to ask any Australian to do anything for me.

But poor Frank Nicholls . . . I really strained the family ties with him!

Yvonne was almost as bad a sailor as Tom and spent most of the voyage in her bunk. Between looking after her and helping me, the trip was no rest cure for her young husband. As soon as he had her safely in bed for the night, he would come to our cabin and with directions from my helpless husband, get me into bed, too. Without Tom's regular and skillful treatments and massage, my legs ached terribly. When Frank heard about this he declared that he "might as well have a go at that, too," with the result that by the time we reached Sydney he was a very competent masseur.

Frank Nicholls never will appreciate fully what a godsend he was to me on that voyage! I never could have managed without him and I was able to ask him to do things for me that I would not have dared ask my robustious, hearty friend Gunnar to do. Moreover, I had to keep fit during the journey. Not only was I faced with a long and arduous concert tour at its end, but before leaving New York I had promised Karl Krueger that on my return I would sing the title role in Strauss' *Elektra* with him and his Detroit Symphony. Far and away the most difficult role I had undertaken, it was necessary for me

to keep at *Elektra* assiduously during the journey to and from Australia.

The Knabe Company had put a small piano aboard for me and I worked daily at the score. Traveling even on a neutral ship in wartime was no picnic. When the ship was as "neutral" as the *Parakoola* and the rest of her line, and engaged in the lucrative but hazardous business of running arms from the United States to Australia, it was a far from pleasant experience. No one's nerves were oversteady and the not infrequent submarine scares that sent our craft zigzagging about the Pacific did not contribute to our peace of mind—especially as we knew the *Parakoola's* hold was crammed with guns, tanks and ammunition, and four huge PT boats worth $100,000 each were lashed on the main deck in full view of inquiring aircraft.

We were blacked-out completely at night. Our radio was used only for the most important business like the reception of weather reports. For most of the journey the Pacific belied its name and reputation and, in a roaring fury, bounced the *Parakoola* about as though she were a fishing smack. What a setting I had for coming to grips with *Elektra*! The first time I used my full voice on the wild and strident parts of the score, passengers and crew, led by the faithful Gunnar, came running to the saloon from all directions anxious to see what ailed me. But I had the role fairly well in hand before we docked, and put the finishing touches to it on the return journey.

Great guns guarded the entrance of Sydney Harbor, across which submarine nets were strung, its waters were jam-packed with warcraft of all shapes and sizes, and its water-front buildings smeared with camouflage paint. It did not present a very attractive picture as the *Parakoola*

made her way towards her berth in the early dawn. How different everything was from what it had been when I had come home for the first time in 1939. But how glad I was the trip was over, albeit nowhere near so glad as Tom, still suffering even as we docked.

It was a strange home-coming, though. This was not the Australia I knew. The cursed blight of war had made its mark on the smiling happy land that had lived for countless centuries in its splendid isolation. I was in a mood to be sad when I looked down on the dock and saw a giant Australian "digger," his cocked-up hat jauntily perched on his head as he walked with fixed bayonet along the dock. He looked up and saw me sitting in my chair.

"Marge Lawrence," he shouted. "What the hell are *you* doing here?"

That was better: that soldier's informal shout was Australian enough for anyone. This was home all right.

Security regulations precluded any positive announcement of when and where we would be arriving. But once we were safely tied up, the news spread quickly and there was quite a little crowd on the dock as Gunnar proudly carried me down the gangplank. Between them, Mr. and Mrs. Nicholls brought Tom down, too, and he managed to work up a wan smile for the photographers rushed to the dock by Sydney newspapers. Some of the crowd followed us up to the Australia Hotel.

By midafternoon that day, life had taken on a more pleasant prospect. We had rested and unpacked. A friend broke the law in the shape of Australian food-rationing regulations and persuaded a shop to sell him a quart of ice cream for Tom—the only food he felt like eating. I had enjoyed a good solid Australian lunch—a welcome change

from the *Parakoola's* pork-and-potato diet. We had been in touch with my family and I was happily visualizing how we would spend the week or more I anticipated we would be given for rest and recuperation before setting out on our concert tour. Tom would have time to recover and I would be able to show him Sydney's magnificent beaches, parks and scenery. We would have some good visits and parties with old friends . . .

A rap on the door stopped my daydreaming. In walked two Australian army officers. They introduced themselves as being attached to the army's "Amenities Section," which among other things was in charge of troops' entertainment. One carried a huge box of flowers with an attached card of greeting from the Australian commander in chief of the Allied Land Forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey.

"You gave us a bit of a fright, Miss Lawrence," one of our callers said. "That boat of yours was five days late. Your concert schedule is all arranged. The boys are waiting for you. We want to get you off tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" I exclaimed.

Tom groaned.

"Yes, tomorrow," the fellow replied unabashed. "A car will call here for you at six tomorrow morning and take you to an airfield where you will get a plane for Townsville."

"Townsville! . . . That's two thousand miles away, at least, right up in northern Queensland," I protested.

"Yes, but it's not a bad flight. You can do it easily in a day."

Tom groaned again. That made up my mind.

"Look here, captain," I said, "I intend to be thoroughly co-operative on this tour but I simply can't be ready to

leave tomorrow. We got off the boat only a few hours ago. I have not even seen my accompanist Mr. Lambert." This was Raymond Lambert, magnificent young Belgian pianist who has lived in Australia for many years. "And besides, I have to get my clothes and music ready."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Lawrence," he replied. "I didn't realize all that. It would be a rush for you to leave tomorrow. The following day will be OK."

I paused. There was no groan from Tom.

"All right, captain," I replied. "The following day will be OK."

Normally, Townsville is a peaceful little tropical port halfway down the Great Barrier Reef. Palm trees line the one street of its shopping center and coastal traders tie up at its one dock to pick up the produce from farms that lie inland from the town. But it was not a normal Townsville we beheld as we were escorted from the flying boat base to our quarters. Its harbor was packed with ships and as we flew in, a great convoy was forming up. That night, loaded with troops and supplies, it would begin its trek up the Australian coast to New Guinea where, although we did not know it at the time, the Allied offensive that was to culminate in General Douglas MacArthur's return to the Philippines was being mounted.

I never have seen so many Americans gathered together in any one place outside the United States as I saw in Townsville. American-driven jeeps, staff cars and trucks sped in, out and through the town; American military policemen patroled the streets; and everywhere one turned, the eye met an American uniform. Long before I reached Townsville it had developed into so important an Allied base that the Japanese had sent their bombers on suicide

flights from northern New Guinea to bomb it. I think Townsville must have been the most southern penetration the Japanese bombers made. Not that their marathon forays did the little yellow men much good. Never once did their bombs find a target in Townsville or cause the slightest casualty.

I experienced a peculiar thrill being in Townsville. That indefinable "war atmosphere" pervaded the place. I was still some distance from the front line, but I felt at last I was getting into the war. This was what I had wanted—to know that I was able to make my contribution to the Allied effort as directly as possible and to do what I could to help the men doing the actual fighting.

My first concert in Townsville began with a near riot. There had been no evacuation of Townsville's civilians. Most of them had been urged to stay on their jobs to cater to the wants of the influx of servicemen. Life must have been rather drab and very uncomfortable for the people of Townsville in those days. Certainly very little good music came their way. In any case, on the night of my concert civilians made their way into the hall long before the troops were able to get in from the airfields and camps outside the town. There was a howl of protest from the soldiery as they arrived to find the hall packed. The civilians refused to budge and did not do so until police arrived and hustled them out.

I had received "advice" from many quarters about the programs I should give the troops. The general burden of it was that I should sing "popular stuff" and keep away as much as possible from classical music. Well, I have always made up my own mind about the construction of my programs and, although I listened to the "advice" I

was given, I was determined not to veer from a decision I had made before leaving the United States: I was going to sing for the troops the same programs I would have sung to recital audiences in New York, London, Paris or Sydney.

What ridiculous impulse was it that made some people, and people in authority, too, think that because men had been put into uniforms their taste had suffered some strange metamorphosis enabling them to appreciate only the flippant and the trivial? This deplorable tendency on the part of most Allied authorities to treat servicemen as though they were near morons was a major blunder. Before I had finished my concerts in war areas in the Pacific and in Europe I had sung to hundreds of thousands of fighting men of all nationalities and it was a rare occurrence for me to give a concert without having many of the men come to me afterwards and thank me for having sung good music to them. Perhaps they had had a surfeit of risqué comedians and young women whose chief ability to entertain (if that be the word) was based on essentially physical grounds!

An even more significant aspect of this question was brought to my notice in Australia where troops who had fought in New Guinea told me that the pap and piffle brought to them by Australian and American radio stations compelled them to listen to Berlin and Tokyo when they wanted to hear serious music. In fairness to Australian and American broadcasters I must add that the make-up of their programs for the troops was dictated by Allied Headquarters.

To return to Townsville: I opened my concert with Malotte's "The Lord's Prayer," and followed it with some

opera excerpts from Wagner and a group of *lieder*. I sang both the Wagner and the *lieder* in German but gave translations of them and, with the opera, I told enough of the story for my audience to appreciate where the arias I sang fitted into the plot. I rounded out the program with traditional and contemporary ballads and beloved favorites such as "Annie Laurie" and "Danny Boy."

The reception I received in Townsville firmed my opinion that I knew what the troops wanted to hear and the program I gave there formed the pattern for my subsequent concerts for servicemen. Raymond Lambert, too, refrained from playing down to the troops and even on the tinny little pianos he was forced to use in some isolated spots he always gave of the best in his repertoire: Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Scarlatti, Brahms, Debussy.

We were due to take off from Townsville at four o'clock on the morning following the concert, to fly to Darwin in the Australian Northern Territory. Knowing this, I was all for getting back to our quarters for some sleep directly the concert was over. But no chance. A group of Australian officers had arranged a supper party for us at their mess and were so excited over the preparations they had made that I did not have it in my heart to refuse to go. And I was glad I went. There was a small group of soldiers present who were leaving for New Guinea directly the party ended. They were going on a very hush-hush commando mission that would take them miles behind the Japanese lines. All had volunteered for the job although aware of the risks involved. Just before we left, the leader of the party came to me and, all formality driven away by the pleasant time we had had, said, "Listen, Marge. We want you to be our chin-up girl. Those other fellows can have the

pin-ups. We reckon you're pretty good." It was one of the sweetest compliments I have ever had.

Heavy-eyed and weary, we were out at the airfield shortly after three-thirty next morning for the plane that would take us on our thousand-mile flight to Darwin. Laden transports were taking off like commuters' trains every few minutes, rushing their cargoes of men and materials to New Guinea.

The plane that was to take us to Darwin had experienced trouble on the flight up from Brisbane but, a Royal Australian Air Force officer assured us, places would be made for us in a transport about to take off. Even then the transport was out on the tarmac warming up for its flight. Tom got behind my wheel chair and we tore across the field to the waiting plane, closely pursued by Raymond Lambert with his bags of music, and sundry air force and army personnel including our escort, a Lieutenant Kelly of the Australian Army, with our other belongings. I was hoisted aboard the plane and seated in an aluminum bucket seat. There was barely time for my wheel chair and the rest of our paraphernalia to be stowed away before the plane began its race down the runway and we were off. Apart from the crew, we had the plane to ourselves—that is if you exclude the cargo. Before the day was far advanced we would gladly have excluded the cargo: it comprised fifty five-gallon cans of paint remover.

Some ingredient in this particular type of paint remover, we discovered to our discomfort, expands in high altitudes. We had been in the air a few hours and were flying over some of the most arid and inhospitable country in Australia, when there was an ominous pop from the front of the airplane where the paint remover was stacked. One

can had blown its top . . . literally. Another went—then another, and a stream of the gooey evil-smelling liquid flowed down the plane floor towards us. Before long the cargo-passenger section of the plane was awash with the stuff. I did not mind getting my feet wet but the horrible "chemically" smell of it was hard to take. My nose and throat were irritated to such an extent that I doubted I would be able to sing the following night.

We were all very glad and not a little relieved to land at Fenton and get rid of our cargo. Taking pity on our discomfort, the pilot delayed leaving until the plane could be cleaned out.

Sixteen hours had elapsed since our very early breakfast at Townsville and, apart from a cup of strong tea and a cheese sandwich we had taken on the run during a fuel stop at Cloncurry on the Queensland-Northern Territory border, we had eaten nothing. We were very tired, very hungry . . . and thirsty. Officers from the headquarters of that intrepid Australian soldier, General George "Tubby" Allen, were on hand to welcome us at Darwin. They buoyed our flagging spirits with promises of a shower, some dinner and good cold beer directly we got out to their camp. The camp, they explained, was "just down the track a bit . . . at Adelaide River." Darwin, we knew, had become untenable for large bodies of troops. It was too accessible a target for Japanese bombers based on Timor . . . how accessible a target we were able to see as we began our drive in a staff car "down the track a bit" to Adelaide River. Darwin was within an ace of being wiped out.

We drove and we drove and still we drove. The prospect of a shower, food and beer became progressively alluring

as we traversed mile after weary mile. Australians, I should have remembered, resemble Texans in their approximation of distances. With Australians (and Texans) "down the road a bit" can be anything from ten to a hundred miles. On the hot, dusty Odyssey I have been describing, it turned out to be a mere eighty miles. As mile succeeded mile, my wishful anticipation concentrated steadily on one particular fulfillment. At the outset of the journey I craved a shower, a mug of beer and a meal. By the time we passed the fifty-mile mark, the shower and meal loomed less importantly. Although not a regular beer drinker, my craving by then centered on only one thing—a large mug of cool beer!

Well, finally we did reach the Australian camp. They called out the guard for us and gave us a beautiful "present arms" as we drove through the entrance. Our driver did not slow down and did not stop until we came up in front of a large tent before which stood a blackboard bearing the legend, OFFICERS' MESS. Journey's end, I thought. I could visualize the good beer being poured.

Tom and a Major Patterson, who had been in charge of the group who had welcomed us at Darwin, were getting me out of the car and into my wheel chair when an agitated figure burst through the entrance to the mess tent.

"Hey, Pat," this figure shouted to our Major, military formalities forgotten in the stress of the situation, "you know that case of beer you were saving!"

"Yes," yelled back Major Patterson, dropping me abruptly into the wheel chair. "Nothing's happened to it? Has it? . . . It's all right . . . isn't it?"

"It probably was all right, but some blighter's pinched it."

"Pinched it! Oh, hell . . . well, I'll be . . ."

At that point Major Patterson remembered my presence and stopped in time.

"Go right ahead, Major," I told him. "I know how you feel and what you were going to say. Go right ahead. While you are at it, make it double for me."

But all the risks and disappointments of my long, uncomfortable journey to Adelaide River were forgotten next night when I gave my concert. At one end of a natural amphitheater the troops had built a stage: the sides and top were of galvanized iron, the screen of burlap and the floor of pieces of timber "scrounged" (an Australian army word meaning "justifiably stolen") from many sources. Footlight reflectors had been fashioned by hand and General Allen's own settee, the only such piece of furniture for thousands of miles around, was placed midstage for me to sing from.

The crudest kind of bleachers were provided for my audience, but crude though they were, they provided seating for three thousand. Thousands of others brought their seats with them—gasoline cans, boxes, even a few chairs that doubtless had been "scrounged" from bombed-out Darwin homes. By mid-afternoon on the day of the concert the bleachers were packed and troops—Americans, Australians, Dutch, English and Sikhs—were still pouring in from airfields, antiaircraft posts, camps, hospitals and naval stations situated anywhere within a hundred miles of Adelaide River. Ten thousand men, including a hundred or so Australian aborigines who goggled at me from the boughs of the eucalyptus trees near the stage, were assembled and gave me a great roar of welcome when the burlap curtains were drawn back precisely at eight o'clock.

In the utter silence of the bush night Raymond Lambert began the introduction to my first number, "The Lord's Prayer." Hushed and attentive the vast audience waited. I filled my lungs with air and opened my mouth to sing the first note of the song when the funny little locomotive that drags a weekly train from Central Australia to Darwin let out a piercing peep to announce its departure from Adelaide River. I stopped dead, my mouth agape. There was a roar of laughter from the assembled soldiery, followed by a shout from a typically Australian voice, "Come on, Marge, give it a go."

I nodded to Raymond Lambert. He played the introduction again and I "gave it a go." Lambert and I played and sang for an hour and a half. If I never achieved more with my singing than I did that night, my career has been worthwhile. As the concert ended, the Commanding Officer came on stage and made a lovely speech of thanks and appreciation. He wound up saying, "And now, boys, let's give three cheers for Marjorie Lawrence." That moment I shall remember forever: ten thousand troops standing in the darkness beneath a star-smothered sky and cheering me.

In ten days we traveled five thousand miles, most of it by air. Raymond Lambert and I played and sang at camps and hospitals, wherever an audience was assembled for us. Most of our concerts were out of doors. Sometimes we slept in grass huts, sometimes in tents, sometimes in army cots, occasionally on the ground. We ate what the troops ate and that, because of transportation difficulties, was frequently rather meager fare. Gheckos, small barking lizards that infest northern Australia and the nearby islands, and a species of green frog bothered me more than

anything else. The gheckos roved our beds at night and the frogs' instinctive inclination to inhabit any spot of dampness resulted in their giving me some terrible frights. They leapt out at me from most unexpected places—from my water glass, my soapdish or washcloth, from toilets and from beneath the wooden gratings in the shower baths.

It had been suggested that I wear an army uniform while singing to the troops, but I felt the men would appreciate any feminine glamor I might be able to bring them. Accordingly, I always put on one of my loveliest concert gowns before singing. Keeping it pressed was something of a problem, but there always seemed to be a soldier or a nurse with an iron of some kind that would do the job. On one occasion a nurse took away the gown promising to give it a "quick press," and disappeared. As concert time drew near, I sent my husband to investigate its whereabouts. He ran it to earth in a large tent where my presser was "modeling" it for half a dozen other nurses all of whom were waiting their turn to try on my frock.

"Oh, I hope Miss Lawrence won't be annoyed," said the "model" when she saw Tom. "We've been out here in the wilderness nearly two years and this is the first lovely dress we've seen since leaving home. I simply had to put it on."

No one—certainly not I—could be annoyed by anything these magnificent army nurses did. They won my unbounded admiration and whenever I have heard myself being eulogized for my war service my invariable thought has been, "Oh, yes, but what about the nurses?" And I mean all Allied Troop Nurses. Many of them went practically everywhere the troops went and suffered their share of casualties from bombings and submarine attacks. They

endured the rough army life—the unappetizing food, uncomfortable living quarters, their isolation from all things feminine—with incredible endurance.

Those women were real heroines. I salute them!

Our tour of the Northern Territory ended, we headed south to perform in the big Allied hospitals and camps in and around Australia's capital cities and also, under the J. & N. Tait Management, to sing again for the Australian civilian population, whose unsparing war effort had earned them the world's admiration.

From Darwin we flew to Katharine from where we were to fly south the following day. At Katharine we were to spend the night at a hospital where tents had been set aside for us. We had had a busy day and within an hour of arriving at Katharine at six o'clock at night we were preparing to get into our cots. We were due to take off at four the following morning.

"This might look to you like a very ordinary hospital iron cot, but it looks like heaven to me," I had said to Tom.

Then we had a visitor.

"Miss Lawrence," I heard a voice outside the tent say, "could I have a word with you?"

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It's I, the matron."

She came in, a middle-aged woman, the marks of war and long service in Africa and Australia showing on her face. And she made a plea to me that could not go unanswered. There were five hundred wounded men in her hospital, she said. Men of many nationalities and from all branches of the services. Many of them were left at Katharine because they had been so badly hurt they could not be moved; some waited there for death. No en-

tertainer of any kind had ever been to the hospital. There was not even a camp movie show there. Wouldn't I, she begged, sing for the patients? I hesitated a moment and in that moment three more nurses came into the tent to back up their matron. I was near collapse from exhaustion, but I could not find it in me to refuse the request.

"Please go and tell Raymond we are going to give a concert," I said to my husband.

In half an hour the nurses and their orderlies had gathered five hundred sick and wounded men about a structure that looked like an open-air boxing ring in a cleared space near the hospital. Scores were in beds that had been wheeled out of the wards; nearly all were heavily bandaged or had a limb in a cast. Tom and a soldier lifted me into the boxing ring in my wheel chair and Lambert sat down at a very old, very unco-operative piano. Its keys showed a marked inclination to stay down after they had been hit. The boxing-ring atmosphere might have been responsible for this. But by this time Lambert had become a near genius in getting music out of anything even broadly resembling a piano. We gave one of our usual camp concert performances. As the program went on, our tiredness miraculously left us and when the concert was over I felt peculiarly elated.

Because the Allied authorities regarded me as a valuable morale builder for seriously wounded men—particularly men who knew they would never walk again—I was called upon to sing to some of the most seriously wounded troops in the Southwest Pacific. I am told I helped numberless wounded soldiers to iron out their psychological kinks and to make up their minds to go on living. But their bravery and courage helped me, too.

There was an afternoon when I sang to a wardful of men, all of whom, I think, had lost two limbs. Many looked very sick, but they all had a smile and I knew from their conversation that most of them would, if given the chance, make their contribution towards putting the war-weary world to rights again. And when I had sung to them a youngster, both his arms off just below the elbow, made a gallant little speech of thanks and presented me with a bouquet that he gripped in the crook of his poor right arm.

If, I told myself, men like this could make the best of their misfortune . . . if they could take the bludgeoning that fate had dealt them, I should be able to do so.

I sang wherever I was asked to go and the one big disappointment of the tour was the refusal of General Sir Thomas Blamey to give me permission to go to New Guinea. Troops up there had heard my broadcasts from the Australian mainland and had swamped me with requests to come up and sing for them. General Blamey would give no explanation for his refusal except to say that he made it for "security reasons." We learned later that big troop movements were going on in New Guinea at the time.

My last troop concert in the Southwest Pacific was an unforgettable occasion. The *Parakoola* was about to leave on a return voyage to the United States and we were preparing to sail on her, when I received a request to go to Keswick Barracks not far from Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia, to sing at midday for two thousand Australian troops about to leave for the front. The men, all in battle dress, were arrayed in row after row of seats in a mess hall that looked about as big as Madison

Square Garden. Our concert over, an officer made a speech of thanks, concluding by saying that as an expression of their gratitude, the men would like to sing for me.

At a nod from the officer the assembly stood and began that simple but quite lovely melody we Australians have known for many years as "The Maori's Farewell." It begins, *"Now is the hour when we must say good-by. Soon you'll be sailing far across the sea..."* Neither the words nor the music have any pretense to greatness, but sung as they were that morning by that mighty choir, they were extremely stirring and starkly appropriate. When I got back to the United States I told the story of that morning and sang the song on the "We the People" program of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Later I recorded the melody for Columbia, using the original Maori lyric.

An arrangement of the song, varying very little from the original, has since become a "hit tune" in the United States under the title "Now Is The Hour." Bing Crosby, Gracie Fields, and sundry dance bands have recorded their own interpretations of it and for many weeks early in 1948 the radio and (I am told) the juke boxes played it more than they did any other tune. Doubtless the playing of it brought pleasure to countless millions. But for me, after having heard those men sing it that morning at Keswick Barracks, the song has a solemn hymnlike quality that should not be profaned.

30. Return to Europe

WE ARRIVED back in the United States weeks behind schedule, with broken engagements all over the Union and angry concert and radio managers on every hand. Security precautions precluded our cabling about our date of arrival and in those days it took months for a letter to get across the Pacific. But despite the missed engagements, there were many others to fulfill. As quickly as possible after we disembarked at Vancouver, we hastened across the continent to New York and were installed in our penthouse high over the ice-strewn Hudson just before Christmas. Skidding over the snow-covered New York streets on the last lap of our journey home, our experiences in the Southwest Pacific, in hot sticky Darwin and in the arid vastnesses of Australia's hinterland took on a dreamlike quality in our minds.

Tom and I were looking forward to a nice long rest at Harmony Hills when the American concert season ended. But we were doomed to see very little of our Arcadian hideaway that year. Barely had we time to settle back into the American way of life than an offer came from ENSA (the English equivalent of the United Services Organization) for me to tour the British Isles, Germany, France and the Low Countries, and sing to Allied occupation forces and war-weary civilians. I felt morally obliged to go to Europe, felt it was my duty to go. With their job of fight-

ing over, time hung heavily on the hands of occupation forces. Keeping their morale, their general psychological health for that matter, up to par was, so Allied authorities told us, as important and even more difficult than carrying out the same responsibilities during the actual fighting war.

And so it came about that on the morning of June 10, 1945, when that gallant craft the Cunarder *Queen Mary*, still in her shabby field-gray uniform of war with guns mounted fore and aft, sailed into the Scottish port of Gourock, Tom and Marjorie King were on her deck. Loch Lomond was only twenty-five miles away and I simply had to have a look at it and the "bonny, bonny banks" about which I had sung so many times, before going on to London where ENSA assembled our little troupe. There was Hubert Greenslade, the English musician, who was to be in charge of arrangements; Valda Aveling, a grand little pianist from Sydney who had not allowed the Luftwaffe to interfere with her ideas of following her concert career in England; Norah Newby, the accompanist—and a most accomplished and knowledgeable musician even if we did have to teach her "The Star-Spangled Banner"; an Australian masseuse, Amy Featherstone; and last, but very, very far from least, Bill Marshall, a typical British "Tommy."

Bill is not a musician . . . not a professional, anyway . . . but I doubt if there ever was so competent a charabanc driver! Bill's assignment was to drive us all over Europe in a fantastic vehicle (I suppose it was more motorbus than anything else) and he did a wonderful job. Officially the vehicle was a "charabanc" and it was designed to carry thirty people, so therefore was quite commodious. Its

interior contained a bunk for each of us and facilities for getting a meal... of sorts. This was not luxury travel but it was effective. Heaven knows how many miles we covered, but although scores of them were over roads pock-marked with bomb craters and still being "deloused" for land mines, our charabanc—thanks to Bill Marshall's coolheaded skill and tireless watchfulness—saw the journey out without mishap.

The names of the towns at which we stopped to give concerts are engraved on the minds of all of us who lived through that last war. For month after month, particularly as the dreadful conflict drew to its close, they regularly studded the communiqués of all belligerents. There was Brussels where I sang for a United States Engineer unit on the Fourth of July. Hamburg, its buildings in shambles, its streets converted to rubble, the horrible smell of rotting bodies pervading the air we breathed. There in Hamburg we performed for members of the Royal Air Force—the same laughing, cultured, easygoing men who had destroyed the city. We were welcomed by Canadians in Lüneberg, a badly battered city. Happily, the organ upon which Bach first played many of his compositions was still intact in its little Lutheran church, and Heine's home, bearing evidence of Nazi vandalism, was nevertheless in one piece.

There was Lübeck on the Baltic, and Cuxhaven, that once splendid port on the River Elbe. Bremerhaven—memorable Bremerhaven—where American Red Cross workers dashed out to greet us with piles of doughnuts and (as the troops described it) "real American coffee." Then Hessedorf where I had the honor to sing for the men of the Black Watch. I sang "Annie Laurie" in their club-

house and in return was entertained by their fabulous pipers, including one Canadian—the only Canadian in the Black Watch, he boasted—who played reels during the cocktail hour and had me longing to leap from my chair to dance.

And then Belsen. Infamous Belsen—I can still smell it. Belsen, where the vilest pages of human history were written by Hitler's thugs. Belsen, where mankind plumbed the depths of depravity and fiendishness. There we saw the monstrous gas chambers; the "laboratories" where Nazi scientists carried out their ghoulish experiments to determine human resistance to pain. And we stepped back a thousand years in time, back to the darkest ages, as we beheld the incinerators in which the bodies of thousands of victims of Nazi horror had been destroyed. We saw, too, the still open vast communal graves, the burying place for eleven thousand Belsen prisoners who, for some reason, had not been incinerated.

At all these places and many others I sang programs that my Southwest Pacific experience had shown me the troops wanted, although, and I suppose it was inevitable because I was in Germany, there was an increase in the number of German works. I had had prepared a concert arrangement of the *Götterdämmerung* finale that I sang at most appearances and I found myself including more songs of Brahms and Schubert in my programs.

Germans were not permitted at my concerts, but they gathered in large numbers outside the windows of the halls in which I sang and cheered and bravoed—even when I sang "Rule Brittania" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." I never will be able to reconcile the German's appreciation of music and his priceless contributions to

the art with the capacity for vileness that he demonstrated for those brief, terrible years when he was top dog in Europe. Moreover, even with the Führer dead, his armies routed, the Luftwaffe blasted from the skies, their cities destroyed... the Germans still were arrogant and, if you gave them the chance, highhanded. The fat fräuleins, well-fed and wearing big black boots and raincoats of army type, strutted about as though they still were the nocturnal companions of the heroes of the master race.

July 24th found us at Field Marshal (then) Sir Bernard Montgomery's headquarters at Bad Salzuflen preparing to give a concert. Tom and I were resting in our quarters when an officer arrived with a message. We knew, because the officer was a full colonel, that it must be important.

Throwing me a salute that would have popped the buttons from an entire regiment on review, the colonel handed me an envelope and said, "Miss Lawrence, I have been ordered to deliver this signal to you."

My fingers all thumbs and my heart beating a tattoo against my ribs, I opened the envelope and read the "signal." Addressed to Field Marshal Montgomery's headquarters, the message ran:

> *Her Majesty the Queen has invited Miss Marjorie Lawrence to sing at Buckingham Palace on the afternoon of Wednesday, August 1. Please consult Miss Lawrence and telephone immediately. Need reply urgently at Buckingham Palace.*

"Oh, Angel, listen to this," I shouted. And, forgetting the presence of our colonel, I read the message to my husband.

"Why, darling, that's wonderful," he exclaimed, as excited as I.

We were poring over the short piece of paper when we were reminded by a discreet well-brought-up "ahem" that the colonel still was with us.

"Miss Lawrence," he said, "I have been ordered to find out whether or not you will be able to accept Her Majesty's invitation."

"Accept it... of course, I will. Thank you very much."

"Thank *you* very much, Miss Lawrence," he replied. And throwing me another dazzling salute, he was on his way.

Four days later we flew into Paris on our way to keep our engagement at Buckingham Palace. I had not seen Paris for nearly seven years and as we touched down at Le Bourget my mind flashed back over all that had happened to me and Paris during the interim. Paris always will be home to me, but this was not a happy home-coming: not for me nor for the old friends and colleagues who began calling on me directly we were settled in our hotel. (We had to break our journey in Paris because I had undertaken to give a concert the following night in the Théâtre Marigny for members of all Allied forces.)

The Grodets were among our first callers: Madame Grodet, tired and fragile but still the perfect aristocrat despite the horrors of having her beloved Paris occupied by the hated Boche; and Henri, a terribly changed Henri from the gay, lovable adventurer of my student days, still far from recovered after two wretched years in a German prisoner-of-war camp; and Mimi, beautiful Mimi Grodet, my close, sisterlike companion for so many years... it was incredible that time and the war could have wrought

such changes in her. But when she smiled at me I saw she was the same old Mimi and that one day, not too distant, the joy of living would be restored to her.

So preoccupied was I in studying my old friends I completely forgot the shock it must have been for them to see me in a wheel chair. By this time I had adjusted my mind to being incapacitated and relying upon my husband for so much. But to the Grodets, and other French friends, the tragedy of what had befallen me was starkly, vividly, suddenly revealed. They remembered me as a happy-go-lucky, healthy, noisy, successful young opera singer, as a Valkyrie leaping about the stage of the Paris Opéra, as Salome, Carmen, Tosca, who when her work at the opera was done enjoyed to the full the good things of life that Paris offered.

Tears streaming down their cheeks reminded me that I must be presenting a tragic picture to the Grodets. I was feeling so fit and had been so elated at the prospect of singing again in Paris and of going on to sing at Buckingham Palace for Queen Elizabeth that I was for the moment truly amazed that anyone should be sorry for me. Then, in a flash, I began to feel sorry for myself and to weep, too. The next twenty-four hours must have been very trying for my husband. But, as is usually the case with me, when I have to sing anywhere I can take a grip on myself and, regardless of what has been happening to me or those dear to me, I can direct my mind solely towards the business of singing. I do admit, though, that just that one time I would have liked to cancel the concert in the Théâtre Marigny.

Once the concert had begun I was happy I had not. Admission was restricted to service personnel, but scores of

my old friends, some of the "regulars" from the Paris Opéra who boasted they had never missed one of my performances since my debut, bribed the doorkeepers and gave me a welcome that cleansed my mind and heart of all unhappiness. After the concert there was a supper at the Grodets' for which a leg of lamb, scarcer than gold bricks in Paris, was produced and cooked to a turn by the gifted Yvonne, whom I had "stolen" from the Grodets when I set up my own ménage in Paris. There was good French wine, too, and talk, laughter, music and reminiscing until Tom whisked me off for a few hours sleep before flying on to London.

Le Bourget was fogbound next morning and we were delayed six anxious hours in getting off and experienced one of the roughest trips we have ever had. We were working to such a very fine schedule that every minute was important because we had given ourselves only one day to prepare for the Buckingham Palace concert. We had reservations at the Savoy and after a bath—the first truly good bath we had had for a month—Tom telephoned Queen Elizabeth's Lady in Waiting and explained how I gave a concert. She bade him come to the Palace forthwith to supervise arrangements.

One of the regrets of my life is that I could not go with my husband to the Palace that afternoon to watch him, escorted by the Queen's Lady in Waiting, the Lord Chamberlain and goodness knows how many knee-breeched flunkies, walking from one historic apartment to another choosing the "props"—principally a settee and screens—which were transported to the music room where I was to sing. The settee was a beauty, just the right size and shape and covered with rich red plush and gold that set

off my frock more effectively than a theaterful of spotlights and scenery.

King George was not in London while we were there that time. He had gone to Plymouth to see President Truman who was on his way to Potsdam to make his contribution to the formulation of the famous Declaration. But the Queen and her two beautiful daughters, Their Royal Highnesses the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose, were most gracious hostesses to me and the two hundred guests invited to hear me. When the Queen and the Princesses entered the music room I already was seated on a small platform behind the screens Tom had chosen the day before. As the royal party entered, the screens were removed.

Her Majesty acknowledged the curtsies and bows of the audience and walked over to the platform and shook my hand. With a gracious charm that seems to be the special inheritance of British royalty, she thanked me for having come to Buckingham Palace and added a genuine feminine touch to her greeting by saying she was delighted I had worn such a lovely gown. Lovely gowns were few and far between in London in those days, even at Buckingham Palace. She went on to express the hope that I would sing a program identical with those I had given for the troops. Incidentally, before coming to the Palace I had been advised I might sing in any language. The King and Queen saw no wisdom in outlawing the music of any race because some members of it had behaved badly.

With Norah Newby as accompanist, I opened with a group of songs I had used at many camp concerts and did them quite well. My singer's ear and heart, though, were

not satisfied with the audience's response. The applause lasted long enough but its "quality" was poor; it lacked warmth, there was no spirit to it. I bowed low but lifting my head I took a good hard look at the audience. They were still whacking their hands together and there were smiles on their faces. I kept looking and discovered the cause for my reception sounding weak and halfhearted. Heeding the dictates of court etiquette, all present were wearing gloves. I was much relieved.

Whatever formality was attached to my recital was disrupted with my singing of the *Carmen* "Séguidilla." As I sang the top *B* at the end of the aria, Crackers, the Queen's Corgie terrier, who until that moment had sat at Her Majesty's feet and behaved with complete decorum, leaped up, bounded across the red carpet to where I sat and barked furiously. I could not help it. I burst out laughing and so did my audience.

"Your dog doesn't like my singing, Your Majesty," I said to the Queen.

"On the contrary, Miss Lawrence," she replied. "He's Welsh, you know, and therefore very musical. He is appreciative, too, and is showing his enthusiasm."

Next morning a London newspaper had the story and headlined it: CRACKERS TAKES A CRACK AT OPERA!

After the concert there were tea and sandwiches, the latter butterless and smeared with a not very appetizing fishpaste which had haunted us throughout Europe. Buckingham Palace, it seemed, was operating on a share-and-share-alike basis with the other rationed homes of England. But if the repast was not sumptuous, the conversation was good. The Queen and her ladies wanted to know about our tour, about Australia, about music in America and what

kind of clothes the women on the other side of the Atlantic were wearing. Princess Elizabeth and her sister Princess Margaret Rose joined in the talk and I admired their frank, natural, unaffected manner.

"My word," I said to Margaret Rose, "that's a beautiful piano you have. I wish all the pianos I have sung with on this tour had been as good."

"Yes, it is nice, isn't it?" responded the Princess. And then, like any adolescent careless of her parents' blushes, added, "It belongs to our cousins. We borrowed it especially for you. It has to go back tomorrow."

It was a glorious afternoon and our visit to Buckingham Palace will always be a treasured memory. And it needed only that brief acquaintance with Queen Elizabeth for me to understand why she is so universally beloved.

31. Musical Diplomacy

BEFORE I left London to return to New York in August, 1945, I met the celebrated English concert manager, Harold Holt, with the result that after having fulfilled engagements in the United States I was back in the British Isles before the year was out for a series of concerts under the Holt banner. I was eager to work with English orchestras and their famous conductors like Boult, Sargent and Beecham. During my brief time in England I had sensed the people's enthusiasm for, and devotion to, great music; and additionally, I shared the view that the resumption of visits by international artists would help the war-battered folk of England realize the blitz was really over.

As Hugh Liversidge remarked in his report to the New York *Musical Courier* after my London concerts:

> One of the cheering features of the cessation of hostilities is that we are now having visits from international celebrities like Casals, Yehudi Menuhin and Marjorie Lawrence. The visit of Miss Lawrence has been particularly inspiring. Under any circumstances her superb voice would be a sensation. But when it is realized that we have had no international opera celebrities visit us within the last six years, you can understand that her impact upon British concert audiences has been almost as shattering as, but in a much more pleasant way than, an atom bomb. . . .

My first London concert was in the Albert Hall with the British Broadcasting Corporation's orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult. Seven thousand people huddled together in the huge old hall, cold and shivering in its unheated vastness. Even the members of the orchestra wore woollen mufflers round their necks and topcoats during rehearsals but, Spartans that they were, discarded them at the performances, though every time the score gave them a chance they blew on their fingers to help keep the blood in them circulating. Beneath my glittering concert gown I wore two acquisitions of my European tour: a pair of very long woollen socks and a set of cold-defying all-wool G.I. underwear.

But even if the orchestra and audience shivered, there was nothing chilly in the way the former played or the latter received our music. I sang my perennial favorite, "Divinités du Styx" and the *Salome* finale. Never had I received such an ovation. The people must have meant it, too. They were back in the thousands the following Sunday when, with Sir Thomas Beecham at the helm, I sang the *Götterdämmerung* finale with the London Symphony—a truly memorable experience for me.

The year 1945 was nearly through by the time my tour, which took me all over England, Scotland and Wales, was ended. Early in the morning of December 31st, Tom and I were at Shannon Airfield in Ireland, waiting for a plane to take us to New York. Rather disconsolately we looked at the fog hanging over the field and prayed it would lift. We wanted desperately to be back in New York that night because the woman who, more than anyone else (outside ourselves), had been responsible for Tom King and me becoming man and wife was giving one of her spectacular

parties in our honor. And that of course was Edmee Busch Greenough. But the fog was thickening, Tom looked at it and shook his head.

"Darling," he said, "I think you and I are going to spend this New Year's Eve right here in Shannon."

"I think you are right," I said. And he pushed me off in my "jeep" to radio our regrets to Edmee.

Our message was no sooner on its way, however, than the sun, with Irish perversity, broke up the fog and we were given the "All Aboard" summons through the waiting-room loud-speakers. Soon we were speeding across the gray Atlantic. But there was a further weather delay at Gander, Newfoundland, and night had settled over New York as we swept in across the city to make our landing at La Guardia. Snow had been falling but the sky was clear and all the stars were out. Down below us the great city sprawled, an illuminated picture of incredible loveliness, and even from five thousand feet up it bore an unmistakable aura of affluence and distinction.

We were out of the plane, through customs and into our apartment in no time at all. While we waited in the lobby for the elevator, I looked at my watch. It was just eleven o'clock; we still had a good chance to see the old year out with Edmee and the rest of our friends. Tom scrambled into his evening clothes and rushed me through the final stages of my own dressing. Then down in the elevator again, into a taxi and full speed ahead for the St. Regis Hotel and Edmee's party. Our entrance was the kind of which prima donnas dream. Our radio message from Shannon had been passed around and it had been taken for granted we were still in Ireland.

The party noises hushed when, right on the first stroke

of midnight, Tom wheeled me into the St. Regis ballroom. There was a veritable yell from our hostess and such a welcome of unmistakably genuine warmth that it did our hearts good. I glimpsed many of my friends—glittering Maria Jeritza and Fritz Kreisler among them. Kreisler was in rare form. He played the piano accompaniment for me to sing Schubert's "Erlkönig" and before the night was out unwrapped his impeccable Strad to play the same composer's "Ave Maria."

Driving home in the small hours of New Year's Day, I leaned my head against Tom's shoulder and we held hands like a couple of newlyweds. What a long "day" it had been, but what a happy one! We felt particularly well disposed, not only towards each other but to the world in general—especially to the peaceful, comfortable United States of America and its happy, friendly people. If you had asked us while our taxi glided down Park Avenue that morning, we both certainly would have told you our most earnest wish was that we might stay put in America, moving about the country to sing, of course, but spending as much of our time as possible with our friends in New York and on our Arkansas ranch. But six months was all we were fated to spend in the United States that time; then we began our transatlantic commuting again . . . and how!

By June I was back in Britain touring with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and its two guest conductors—Leonard Bernstein, surely the most outstanding of the younger flight of American maestri, and my Metropolitan colleague, Erich Leinsdorf. More engagements were offered in Europe when my tour with the orchestra ended, but we had to rush back to the United States so that I

could fulfill my contract with Tony Stivanello to sing Amneris in that season's performance of *Aïda* by his Cincinnati Opera Company.

Before leaving England I had a call from Michel de Bry, of Radio Française, who bore a message from the French government inviting me to sing at a concert the government was sponsoring in October to raise funds to meet that nation's penicillin needs. I regarded that invitation as I would the notification of a command performance from Buckingham Palace. Accordingly, I returned to the French capital on October 7th to begin what developed into one of the most eventful periods of my not uneventful life.

During my brief stopover in Paris the previous year there had been no opportunity to see more than a few of my old friends from the Paris Opéra who had chanced to hear of my visit. On this occasion, however, my coming to France to help the government's penicillin fund was blazoned in the press and, forewarned of my arrival, my Opéra colleagues arranged a "reunion" reception for me in the foyer of the opera house. Everyone was there, including Pierre and Madame Chereau, Germaine Hoerner, Marisa Ferrer, Paul Cabanel, my girlhood hero at Lille; François Ruhlmann, who had conducted at my Paris Opéra debut; members of the orchestra, chorus, ballet, stagehands; and André Pernet, with whom I had sung so many Wagnerian operas. The reunion was a test for us all, but it affected Pernet most. Brave soldier though he had been during the war, he could not bring himself to speak to me but stood alone, weeping, in a corner of the hall.

Georges Hirsch, who had succeeded Rouché as director-

general, made a thrilling speech of welcome in which he implored me to tell the people of the United States that France was struggling to get back on her artistic feet, that the Paris Opéra was making every effort to become worthy again of world recognition and respect. Before the reception was over, Georges Hirsch made me the greatest gift it lay within his power to give—he asked me to sing again at the Paris Opéra. Wagner, he explained, still was struck from the repertory, but would I return when I had fulfilled my other engagements (among them were two performances of *Tristan und Isolde* for the British Broadcasting Corporation with Beecham and a recital at Covent Garden) and sing Amneris for him.

The penicillin gala at which I sang on October 16th was one of the most brilliant social functions Paris had seen since the war. Next day I was summoned to the Quai d'Orsay where, in the presence of members of the Cabinet, Madame Bidault, wife of the then Premier, decorated me with the Légion d'Honneur for my services to French music and my work on behalf of the Allied cause. I felt immensely proud. As I was wheeled out into the street after the ceremony, I looked at the insignia Madame Bidault had pinned on my frock and then up at the familiar skyline of Paris. I smiled to myself as my mind harkened back to my first days in this wonderful city. Marjorie Lawrence, the country bumpkin from Australia in her homemade suit, not only had achieved her fantastic ambition to sing at the Paris Opéra but had received a signal honor from the French Government. It really was a wonderful world.

It was mid-December before I could take up Georges Hirsch's invitation to return to the Paris Opéra. He as-

sembled a wonderful cast: Ruhlmann conducted, my old friend Germaine Hoerner sang Aïda and José Luccioni sang Radames, both singing magnificently. The night of the performance was one of intense excitement for everyone—the cast, the orchestra and the packed audience which, I am positive, included every one of my old "followers" who possibly could attend. The excitement was heightened during the intermission between the third and fourth acts when my fellow artists came to my dressing room and presented me with a diamond miniature of my Légion d'Honneur decoration. When the opera resumed, I wore the gift pinned on my white costume. Seeing it, the audience proclaimed its discovery with a roar of acclamation.

The performance went beautifully and there was quite a demonstration from the audience at the final curtain. Still seated in the palanquin from which I had sung the entire Amneris role, I took a number of calls with the rest of the principals. Then I was carried off stage and lifted into my wheel chair. Tom, who had been waiting in the wings, was pushing me back to my dressing room when a stagehand came tearing after us, yelling that the audience was demanding my return to the stage. The palanquin had been put away and my carriers dispersed; so José Luccioni and Germaine Hoerner pushed me out onto the stage in the wheel chair.

During the years I sang seated, I endeavored to camouflage my incapacity as much as possible and took every precaution not to let it distract my listeners' attention from the music. Never did I—in the well-remembered words of Edward Johnson—seek to "capitalize" on my inability to walk. That night in Paris was the only occasion on which

an operatic audience has seen me in a wheel chair. The people rose as we came on. Twelve times we were forced to acknowledge the ovation. My emotions were in a turmoil. The United Press said it was "the greatest ovation ever heard in the Paris Opéra." Dear Pierre Chereau, who hastened to me, stroked my head and said, "Weep, *mon enfant.* It will do you good. We understand what kind of tears they are."

Christmas was drawing near again and Tom and I were looking forward to spending it in New York. The year 1946 had been exacting, and I felt I should have a rest before undertaking a list of American concert dates. But there were other people in Europe at that time who also were thinking longingly about an American Christmas. They were the men of Uncle Sam's occupation forces.

While I was in Paris I received a message from the United States Military Governor of Berlin and commander in chief of United States Occupation Forces, General Lucius Clay. The General stated frankly that the prospect of another Christmas in Berlin had somewhat "browned off" his troops. Would I not come to Germany and see if a series of concerts with German orchestras would help to buck up the men's morale? I will admit I stopped, but only briefly, to count the cost of engagements I would have to miss in the United States, and then sent off a message of acceptance to General Clay. I felt it was the *right* thing to do and, as is so often the case when you do something solely because you feel it is *right,* I was well rewarded: my return to Germany developed into a highly exciting adventure.

I gave my first concert on my return to Germany at Wiesbaden with Sergeant Gibson Morrissey, of the United

States Army, conducting a German orchestra. By December 23 we were in Berlin where, with Sergeant Morrissey again conducting but on this occasion the recently re-formed Berlin Philharmonic, I gave a concert for the Allied forces. It was after this concert that General Clay asked me to delay still longer my return to the United States. He suggested I return to Berlin after concerts arranged for me in other parts of Germany, and assist him to carry out an idea he had been turning over in his mind for some time. (The purpose of his idea was to arrest the deterioration of relations between United States and Soviet occupation authorities and to help along the democratization of the German population.)

In recent days Americans have been able to glimpse the enormous task General Clay has been doing for them and the spectacular brilliance and knowledge he has brought to bear in discharging it. I will admit, though, that when he revealed his reason for asking me to come back to Berlin, I was surprised: he wanted me to give a concert with the Berlin Philharmonic in Berlin to which he would invite the leaders and their staffs of the Allied occupation forces plus a large number of influential and democratically inclined Germans.

For the Russians, he suggested I should sing Russian opera in Russian and for the Germans, some of their own music, Wagner preferably, and that of course in German. He was anxious to show the Russians that Americans were well disposed towards them. And he wanted to bring it home to the Germans that an Anglo-Saxon member of an American opera company could sing their music with authority and skill.

"You are the only singer I know capable of fulfilling

this assignment," said General Clay. "I know it is not an easy task, but I am sure you could carry it out. If you do, I assure you, you will be helping us very much."

My itinerary would not permit my return to Berlin until December 30th, but I told General Clay I would be honored to sing for him, and to go ahead with the concert arrangements. When we returned all was ready. The concert was to be given in a huge Berlin auditorium, the Titania Palast, and Sergui Celibidache, youthful Rumanian-born protegé of Furtwängler, was to conduct. The Berlin Philharmonic, it was reported to me, had been rehearsing the music we were to perform together: the "Letter Song" from Tschaikowsky's *Eugene Onegin* and the finale of *Götterdämmerung*. I speak no Russian but, happily, a good fairy some time before had prompted me to learn the "Letter Song" and I had worked meticulously on the Russian text with Zenia Vassenko in New York.

This Berlin concert was an occasion! I do not scare easily these days, but readily admit to a severe attack of jitters that night. General Clay had invited four thousand people, including twelve hundred hand-picked Germans—and although we were driven to the Titania Palast in one of General Clay's own cars, emblazoned with the four stars of his high rank, and were provided with a jeep escort, I feared we never would reach the auditorium. Every road leading to it was jammed with traffic and my agitation increased as time ticked by with each delay.

Inside the hall there was an atmosphere of tension and excitement. The front seats were occupied by the leaders of the four occupation powers, each surrounded by his own heavily bemedaled retinue. There was the host, General Clay, with his political adviser, Mr. Robert Murphy;

General Sir Brian Robertson of Great Britain; General Noiret, then in command of French troops; and the man whom the entire world has come to know only too well since, General Alexander Kotikov, of the Soviet Union. Drably dressed, silent, the Germans sat behind the uniformed splendor of their conquerors.

I opened with the "Letter Song" and prayed fervently that Zenia Vassenko had done her work well. I was overjoyed to find my voice at its best, clear and true and responsive to my bidding. The "Letter Song," as I sing it, takes just thirteen minutes to perform and, with the Berlin Philharmonic playing in magnificent style, I recovered from my language worries long before the aria was over. There was complete silence until the last overtone of the music faded away and then a multilingual shout of approval surged from the hall. How happy and relieved I was to see (my eyes had not strayed from them for very long) that the handsome Kotikov and his Red Army cohorts let forth the first bravo—or the Russian equivalent thereof.

The psychological barrier that had interposed itself between me and the orchestra during the rehearsals and earlier in the concert fell as the Berlin Philharmonic, guided by the masterly hand of Celibidache, played the opening soul-stirring phrases of the finale of *Götterdämmerung*. I have sung it many times but never have I got so much from it. Instead of being possessed by a spirit of exuberance or elation as a singer often is when she knows she is giving a better than usual performance, my reaction on this occasion was more one of humility: humility and gratefulness . . . gratefulness to God that I was in good

form and worthy to serve in this cause for which General Clay had chosen me.

Celibidache, who as a former enemy of my country had been the acme of formal politeness, stepped from the podium immediately the *Götterdämmerung* was over, rushed to me and covered my hand with kisses. The concertmaster, beside himself with delight, shouted *"Einmal im leben..."* ("Once in a lifetime") before he, too, put my hand to his lips.

A contributing cause for the German musicians' emotion was that our performance marked the lifting of the Allied ban on Wagner's music being played and sung in Germany. As *Time* magazine stated it in its next edition, "Lawrence de-Nazified Wagner."

After the concert, General Clay and his lovely wife gave a spectacular reception in a mansion, once the home of Hitler's financial genius Hjalmar Schacht. The General was delighted and congratulated me on "a job nobly done." He declared that the tension of multipowered occupation in Berlin would be reduced considerably if such occasions could be more frequent.

With Kotikov beaming at their head, the Russians strode into the reception looking like the lords of creation. Kotikov greeted me with a torrent of Russian and refused to believe I could not speak the language. To show his appreciation of my singing, he recited the whole of the "Letter Song" in Russian and said "Moscow would be honored" if I would go there and sing. When General Noiret saw I was wearing the insignia of the Légion d'Honneur, he embraced me and asked about my days at the Paris Opéra. And Sir Brian Robertson complimented

me on the contribution he said I had made to Allied good will and understanding in Berlin.

Tom and I made our exit in the wee small hours and as we waited on the driveway outside the house for our car to drive up and listened to American voices inside raised in unmistakably American song, it was difficult to believe that this was Germany, that not so many months before this great house had been a gathering place for the monsters of the Nazi hierarchy.

I shuddered at the thought.

32. On My Feet

FIVE YEARS had passed since I had resumed my career . . . five years which, I am sure my readers will agree, had brought me a full share of happiness and professional satisfaction. Perhaps I, who had been at death's door, should have been content at the extent of my recovery from poliomyelitis and the extent to which I had been able to follow my profession. But would I have been human if I had been content? We get something, we want something more. The "something more" I wanted was to be able to sing standing again.

Wherever we traveled, inside and out of the United States, we consulted specialists and worked at various kinds of treatments. Some brought me a little relief and improvement in my condition. But gradually I came to realize that the chances of my being able to walk in the near future were not very strong. Still, I felt that I might be able to stand, to stand and sing. Dear God, if I might only sing on my feet again, became my daily prayer. Always lurking in my mind was the picture of me standing, song pouring from my mouth, with an orchestra ranged behind me.

Once or twice I tried it. I was able to stand, to get onto my feet, but I tired quickly and when I tried to sing my voice sounded strange in my ears. Almost without knowing it, I had cultivated a new technique for singing while

seated. I had brought new muscles in my abdomen and chest into play. While seated these muscles reacted promptly in controlling my breath which to all intents and purposes is my voice. Now, when I tried to sing standing, these muscles were out of place. My voice wavered. It was not Marjorie Lawrence's voice.

But I would not give in. I would not abandon my goal to sing standing. Whenever I had the time I worked at it, even if it were only to sing a few scales or exercises. One day the thought struck me that as singing had played a tremendous part in restoring movement to and strengthening the upper parts of my body, if I could learn to sing standing, other parts of my body would benefit. My husband watching me work, kept praising me, urging and coaxing. I began to get results: my control improved, I was able to sing an aria through. I felt that if I could have more time to devote exclusively to it, I would eventually be able to sing on my feet. But there were engagements to be kept, there was another trip to London and Paris. I could not stop my career.

I made my most marked progress during the weeks I spent at Harmony Hills. There I was able to concentrate solely on recovering the technique to sing while standing. The peace and beauty of the surroundings had proved a source of inspiration to me with anything I had tried to do at Harmony Hills and they did not fail me in my drive to master this new problem. Neither did the friendship and encouragement of my dear friends at the ranch fail me. Beloved "Aunt" Mary Hedrick, our noble "ally" Clara Weekes, and our head ranch hand, rugged, honest Charles Lynn, that typical man of the Arkansas hills, listened with

their critical ears as I worked each day. They assured me they could discern the progress I was making.

The progress might not have been as marked as "Aunt" Mary, Clara and Charles Lynn would have had me believe. I did not think so, anyway, although of course a singer must of necessity be her or his own most severe critic. But progress was being made. I could sing for longer periods while standing. Even more important, my mind was becoming adjusted to the change. I was becoming accustomed to singing while standing. Once again it was the *natural* thing to do. Nevertheless there was a long way to go and I estimated it would take about a year before I would dare to sing publicly in anything but a sitting position. Besides, although I could stand, I could not walk except with crutches (and I was determined no audience was going to see me getting about on crutches), so there was the problem of getting on and off a stage to be solved.

Heaven knows how or where I might have made my "standing-up" return to the concert stage if Fate and my husband had not taken a hand. We were back in New York from the ranch in May, 1947, packing our bags for another European trip when we had a visit from Dr. Artur Rodzinski, who shortly before had begun his brief, brilliant reign as conductor of the Chicago Symphony. Rodzinski told me he was planning a concert performance of *Elektra* with the orchestra in Chicago the following December and wanted me for the title role.

I had sung *Elektra* seated the previous season with my good friend Dr. Karl Krueger and the Detroit Symphony. The performance had been immensely successful, so I accepted Rodzinski's invitation enthusiastically. Although the proposed concert was seven months off, Rodzinski

already was feverishly excited by its prospect. His visit to our penthouse ended with our going through page after page of the fabulous Strauss score—he playing the piano part and I, oblivious of Tom and Clara Weekes making frantic endeavors to get our packing completed, singing for all I was worth. The music of *Elektra* was ringing in my ears when our plane took off from La Guardia a few hours later.

We returned from Europe in July. There were a couple of months before the New York season began and I was determined to put these in at the ranch hastening the day when I would be able to sing standing. I could stand now long enough for a brief orchestra appearance, to sing an aria or other operatic excerpt that might take fifteen or twenty minutes to perform. There still remained, however, the problem of getting on and off a stage while in full view of an audience. But my husband had undertaken to cope with that and I was confident he would come up with the answer.

He suggested that a platform of some kind on wheels, provided with a railing, would be the best solution. Actually what he had in mind was something very similar to an orchestral conductor's podium... but one that was mobile. Tom's difficulty was to draw plans for such a vehicle (I suppose that is the word that best describes it) that would be light but durable, capable of being dismantled and packed into as small a space as possible, but also capable of quick assembly.

One masterpiece he dreamed up would have been equipped with a small electric motor and a hand lever with which I would have been supposed to direct its progress. I would have no part of this monster. I had

visions of its getting out of control and tearing over the footlights and into the orchestra pit, or rampaging about the stage playing havoc with members of an orchestra and their instruments. No, I told my husband, being a singer is job enough in itself; playing streetcar driver had no appeal for me at all. Finally he took his plans and ideas to the New York firm of Keefe & Keefe, whose light, collapsible wheel chairs had given me such good service.

Keefe & Keefe assigned one of their technicians, a clever young Negro, Calvin James, to the task. He and Tom sweated over plans and designs for the best part of a day. Between them they evolved, and Calvin James built, a two-foot square platform mounted on four tiny wheels or rollers. Aluminum rods in each corner of the platform supported a waist-high railing on either side and at the back of the contraption. It could be taken apart and reassembled quickly and was delivered to us at the ranch in a canvas bag Calvin had made to fit it.

With the arrival of the stand at the ranch, the heat was on me to push ahead with the task of singing standing up. At the beginning I was rather discouraged. The stand itself was satisfactory, but I found that the brace it was necessary for me to wear on one leg was not comfortable and caused me no little pain if I wore it too long. We did not push things. My first target was to spend one hour—not necessarily singing all the time—on my feet. I achieved that and at the end of one month's solid work I was able to stand for two consecutive hours. The accomplishment was hailed as a triumph by the household.

Those were busy days at Harmony Hills. Apart from my battle with the perambulating podium I was working hard on *Elektra*. I knew the role well enough, but *Elektra*

is not the kind of music you can pick up and put down as the spirit moves you, or be ready to give a performance of whenever it is called for. In my estimation *Elektra* contains the most strenuous, most difficult music ever written for a singer. Regardless of how often one might sing it, one must prepare for each performance as though one were doing the role for the first time. As my vocal production became freer and the tension and strain that had characterized my first attempts at singing standing disappeared, I began singing parts of this opera while on my feet.

There came a memorable day when, perched in my little stand, I sang Elektra's famous monologue in which she vows revenge on the murderers of her father, Agamemnon. This is the first music of the role. But instead of stopping there I kept on, still standing, continuing right through the entire opera without pause. By this time the entire household—Tom, Aunt Mary, Clara Weekes and the rest—knowing the music almost as well as I did myself and realizing what I was about, crept into the music room and gave me a cheer when the final page of the score was turned. I had sung the entire opera through—two hours on my feet. And my voice was better when I finished than when I had begun—even if physically I was a bit tired.

My husband smiled as the others applauded. I could see he was as happy as I, and very proud. But, and how well I know that man, I could sense too that his mind was buzzing: the time was ripe for him to push me past yet another milestone on my journey towards recovery.

"Why, darling," he said, "that's just fine. Won't Rodzinski be glad when we tell him you will be able to sing

standing up for him when you do *Elektra* in December?"

"Oh . . . don't be silly," I laughed. "You don't know what you are saying. Sure, I can get through the opera here . . . but imagine the difference between here and Chicago."

"What difference?" he blandly asked.

"What difference?" I shrieked. "Why, the audience, the orchestra, the critics. No, not me. Let me crawl, darling, before I run."

"You look to be running pretty well to me."

"Now look here," I said. "After today I think I will be able to make some appearances standing next season . . . but *not Elektra.*" And then with some heat as the thought struck me: "Look here, my fine fellow, you don't seem to appreciate what the singing of this role involves even for the fittest and strongest singers. How many women in the world do you imagine can sing it, anyway?"

"Why," he said, "maybe three or four."

"Yes," I replied, "three or four—maybe!"

"So what . . . aren't you one of them?"

I gave up. How can a woman argue with a man like that? But he had sown the seeds and they began to sprout ideas, much as I tried to stifle them. Tom, however, had made up his mind. I would sing *Elektra* on my feet in Chicago. And he never let me forget it. Coming into the music room as I worked, he would listen for a while and invariably before making his exit would say something like, "My, that sounds wonderful today. Chicago will love it."

By the time we came back to New York in October, a tacit agreement had sprung up between us that I would try to be on my feet for the *Elektra* performance with Rodzinski. I had no sooner got inside the apartment than

I had Paul Meyer on the phone. Paul, besides being my invaluable coach and accompanist, is one of my best and frankest friends. I knew I could rely on him to tell me honestly what he thought about my singing *Elektra* standing—especially as he had been present at some of those first not very successful attempts I made to sing standing a few months before.

Paul arrived at the penthouse next morning. I had not told him on the telephone what I had in mind. He thought we were to have a usual rehearsal of a recital program. But I reached from my platform, took the score of *Elektra* from the top of the piano and put it before him.

"Come on, Paul," I said, "I want to go right through this."

He gave me a quizzical smile, flexed his fingers once or twice and began to play, brilliantly as always. I prayed as I stood there alongside the piano and Paul played the introductory measures, that I would be able to repeat my performances at the ranch. I wanted . . . oh, so very much . . . to give Paul Meyer the illusion that he was seeing and hearing me as he had so many times in the days before my illness. But directly I began to sing, I forgot whether I was sitting or standing. Singing *Elektra* occupies one completely. I had no mind for anything other than singing.

Paul Meyer was weeping as he played the closing page of the music. He got up from the piano stool, and walking over to me, very solemnly kissed my cheek. My cup of happiness was filled to overflowing as he said, "You are magnificent. I never heard you sing better." And I knew he would not have said it if he had not meant it. Tom, who had listened and watched in silence throughout, now made his entry bang on the beat.

"And, Paul," he said, "don't you think she should do it standing in Chicago?"

"Oh, yes," he cried. "She must . . . she must."

I was not prepared yet to capitulate and say positively I would do as my husband and Paul Meyer urged. About the actual singing I now had no qualms. What disturbed me was how I would look to an audience. During the five years that I sang seated, I had developed an easy, comfortable platform manner. I wondered whether I would appear as easy and comfortable on my little railed platform. My tendency was to clutch too tightly and too often to the rails. Here, too, I would have to develop a new technique, to appear to be touching the rails only lightly while obtaining enough support from them to minimize fatigue and remain steady.

So I made a deal with Tom and Paul. I told them I would hire a New York theater and as nearly as possible simulate the conditions under which I would have to sing in Chicago. If I were satisfied after such a test, I would agree to telling Rodzinski that I would sing *Elektra* standing. We booked a little theater in uptown Manhattan, but we kept our plans for the "trial run" secret from everyone except Paul Meyer and Clara Weekes. My husband and Paul arranged chairs on the platform as though we might be expecting an orchestra to join us, making an aisle through the chairs from the wings to midstage. Several times Tom pushed me and my platform on and off through this aisle.

We had a technician in to arrange the lighting and, with Tom and Clara for an audience and Paul Meyer, not only playing the accompaniment but in that screechy accompanist's voice of his doing all the other parts, male and fe-

male, I went through *Elektra.* The first couple of performances were not good enough to make up my mind for me. But the third was. When we got back to the apartment I telephoned my manager, Jack Adams, and told him. He immediately rang Rodzinski in Chicago. Whooping with excitement, the maestro summoned the press and gave out the story. As congratulatory messages came in by phone and telegraph from all over the country I felt I had been trapped.

For days I regretted I had permitted the excitement and satisfaction of an afternoon's good singing to prompt me to decide to undertake this thing. Oh, why had I not been satisfied to go on singing as I had! Had I not sung well? Didn't people all over the world proclaim my work? Why couldn't I have left well enough alone? I worked myself into such a state that I imagined all kinds of tragedies happening on that December night, now only a month off, when I would sing at Chicago. Tom laughed at my fears, told me I had been sitting down long enough, that now I could stand I would be imposing on the public if I did not do so.

I was still suffering spasmodic torments when we booked in at our favorite Chicago hotel, the Drake, the day before the first rehearsal with Rodzinski and the orchestra. A splendid cast, all the leading members of it old friends, had been assembled: Herbert Janssen was to sing Orestes, Irene Jessner, Chrysothemis and Enid Szantho, Klytemnestra. There was a rather emotional scene when we assembled on the platform of Orchestra Hall at the rehearsal because, of course, it was the first time Janssen and the others had seen me standing since I had farewelled them to go to Mexico City. But we all were too engrossed

with the job at hand to spare too much time for emotional scenes.

Finally the great night arrived, a night I knew was to be one of the most spectacular or one of the most tragic of my career. Orchestra Hall seemed overrun with photographers when we arrived. There was a flock of them outside the Hall popping their flashbulbs at us as we got out of our car. There were even a few in my dressing room taking shots of the dozens of bouquets and stacks of telegrams awaiting me there. I love photographers and that wonderful impression they give that the entire world and all that happens in it exists only that they may take pictures of it.

Without any hint of apology for having let themselves into my dressing room, they greeted my arrival with a chorus of "Oh, here she is now."

"Please do not let me disturb you, gentlemen," I remarked icily.

"That's all right, Miss Lawrence," responded one of them, completely unabashed, "we are all through."

"I'm not, Bud," put in one of the others. And picking up a telegram from the stack he brought it to me and said, "I'd like to get a shot of you reading this . . . open it up, will you, and just be looking at it."

I do not know why, but I did as I was told. I opened the telegram. It was from the wife of the undertaker at Hot Springs, and read, *Praise the Lord! Wonderfully happy for my beautiful one and doctor.* The cameraman took his shot and left, but he had caused me to break a standing rule. I never read messages of any kind before a performance, fearing one might contain something that will distract my mind from the work before me. But having

broken the rule by reading the telegram from Hot Springs, I decided to go right through the pile.

The third one I opened gave me a special thrill. It was from Buckingham Palace and was signed by the Lady in Waiting to Queen Elizabeth. It stated: *The Queen is delighted to hear of your great achievement and wishes you all success tomorrow, December 11. Her Majesty so well remembers your singing before Their Majesties in 1945.* That this great and noble lady with all her tremendous responsibilities and duties should remember me and take the time to send such a message filled me with elation.

And there were wonderful messages from Mary Pickford, Greer Garson, Jeanette MacDonald, the Australian Minister, Arthur Calwell, Sir Thomas and Lady Beecham, Harold Holt, Lawrence Tibbett, Lily Pons and André Kostelanetz, the French War Veterans and Edward Johnson. The latter ran: *The entire Metropolitan family shares with you the joy that must be yours tonight.* There were dozens more. I appreciated them all and was still aglow with the joy such expressions of sincere interest and encouragement gave me, when Tom pushed me into the wings on my little platform.

It had been our intention for him to wheel me quickly through an aisle between the orchestra's chairs to a place near the podium. We waited in the wings until Rodzinski and the other soloists had taken up their positions. Then Tom began his run. He did not get far. Photographers blocked our way. A hundred bulbs flashed before we finally arrived at the place allotted me alongside the other singers. The audience was in an uproar, standing to applaud and shout. Believe me when I say I engaged in

a fierce mental struggle with myself to keep my wits about me.

Even after all we soloists were lined up near Rodzinski, the audience continued its demonstration and it seemed the photographers never would exhaust their supplies of flashbulbs and plates. They were reinforced at this stage by a group of newsreel men who, their cameras whirring, dashed about like dervishes filming me from every angle. Tom kept close throughout this fuss, urging me to keep my chin up, not to let the "to-do" distract me.

"Don't forget you are *Elektra,*" he murmured in my ear as Rodzinski, smilingly patient at the delay, rapped on the podium with his baton.

Tom and the photographers melted into the darkness. The opera began.

For the purpose of my story I would like to be able to say that throughout the performance I was filled with elation and ecstasy. But I was not. Some of the music I cannot remember at all. With utter truthfulness I can say that I was not conscious of the fact that I was standing. The music possessed me. I was aware of Rodzinski, and my mind registered the fact that the orchestra under his dynamic and inspiring direction was giving a stupendous performance, progressing magnificently from mood to mood of the score. I knew Jessner, Szantho and Janssen were in splendid voice. I hoped I was singing well enough to compare favorably with them.

As the music ended, a brief heavy silence hung in the auditorium. I had experienced this phenomenon before. It always frightens me a little, but I know it is the biggest compliment an artist or a performance can receive because it shows that the audience is still under the spell of

what it has seen and heard. But after one soundless moment, that Chicago crowd rose to its feet, wildly applauding and shouting.

"Thank God," I thought. "The performance has gone all right, anyway. I must have done well."

We singers took several bows with Rodzinski and the orchestra, and it was not until I was called back for several more alone with Rodzinski and then more by myself that I realized the extent of my success. If I could have done so I would have strutted like a peacock. As it was, I stood proudly on my little platform as Tom pushed me on and off the stage for bow after bow. The houselights went up but no one was inclined to leave the hall. The crowd cheered on.

As we turned to leave the platform the last time, I had the extraordinary sensation that I was walking rather than being rolled along on my platform. And, as though in a flash of revelation, as though the impulse came to me from the One Great Mind, I knew, knew that in God's own good time I would walk again. Truly "the Lord is my strength and song and has become my salvation."

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